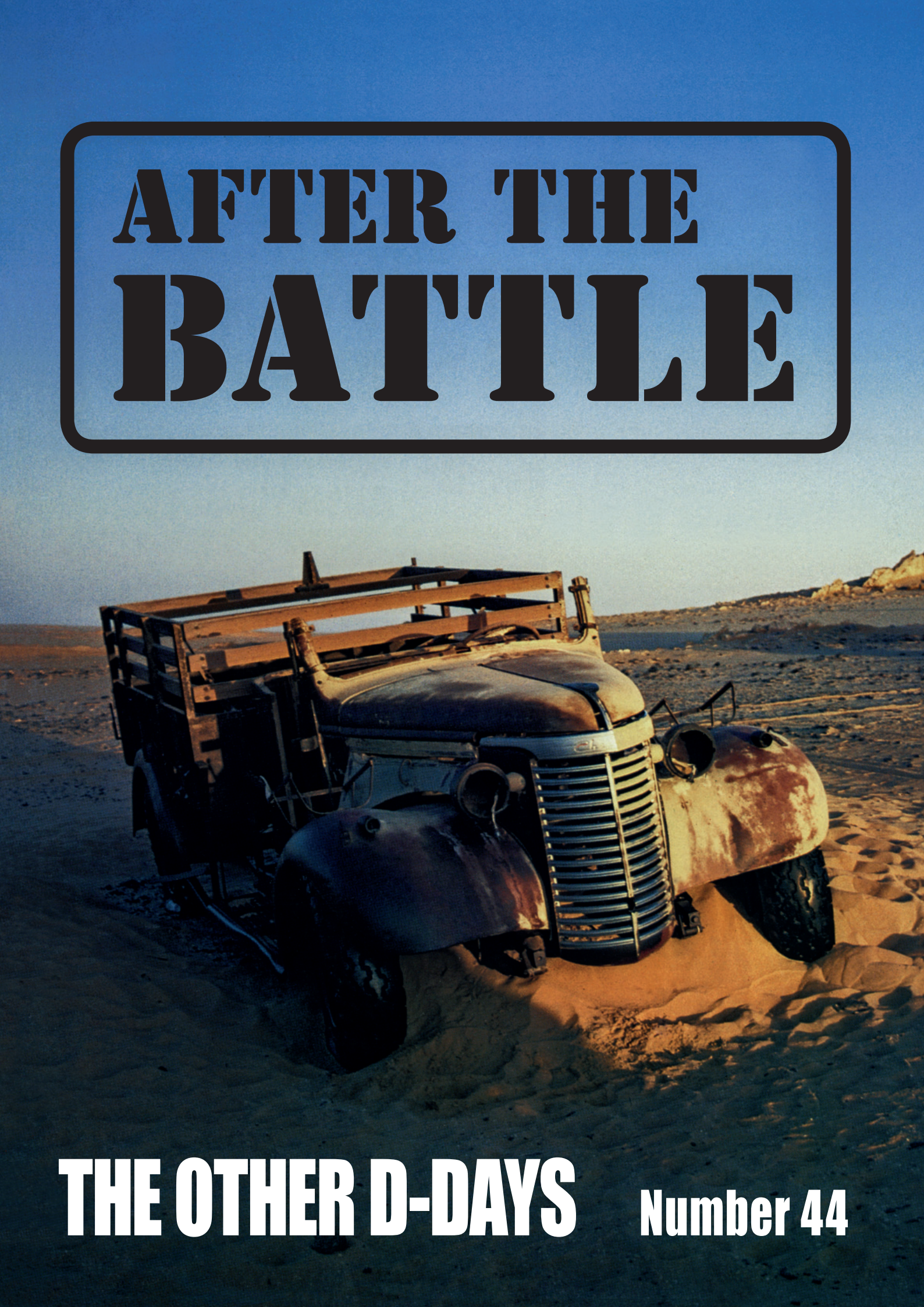
# AFTER THE BATTLE



THE OTHER D-DAYS

Number 44

# AFTER THE BATTLE

## NUMBER 44

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**Front Cover:** Lost in the Western Desert for forty years; a Long Range Desert Group Chevrolet truck. (Piers Lloyd Owen)

**Centre pages:** Memorial with a difference. This obelisk commemorates the sacrifices of the living; the people of south Devon who gave up their homes to provide a battle training area for D-Day.

**Back Cover:** Batterie Austrât: 11-inch guns from the battlecruiser *Gneisenau* silently guard the approaches to Trondheim Fjord, Norway. (Rudi Rolf)


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# IMPORTANT MEETINGS

**The area described below is to be REQUISITIONED urgently for military purposes, and must be cleared of its inhabitants by DECEMBER 20th, 1943.**

**Arrangements have been made to help the people in their moves, to settle them elsewhere, and to advise and assist them in the many problems with which they will be faced. To explain these arrangements**

# PUBLIC MEETINGS

**will be held as follows:**

**FRIDAY Nov. 12th**
11 a.m. **EAST ALLINGTON CHURCH**
2-30 p.m. **STOKENHAM CHURCH**

**Earl Fortescue, M.C., The Lord Lieutenant in the Chair.**

**SATURDAY Nov. 13th**
11 a.m. **BLACKAWTON CHURCH**
2-30 p.m. **SLAPTON VILLAGE HALL**

**Sir John Daw, J.P., Chairman Devon County Council in the Chair.**

**These general meetings will be immediately followed by special meetings to discuss the problems of farmers, who are requested to remain behind for them.**

**IT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT to every householder that he should arrange to attend whichever of these meetings is nearest to his home, and where necessary employers of labour are requested to give their work-people time off for this purpose.**

# THE AREA AFFECTED

**ALL LAND AND BUILDINGS lying within the line from the sea at the east end of Blackpool Bay in Stoke Fleming parish to Bowden; thence northward along the road to the Sportsman's Arms; thence west along the Dittisham-Halwell road to the cross-roads ¼-mile east of Halwell village; from this cross-road along the Kingsbridge road to the Woodleigh-Buckland cross-roads; thence along the road Buckland, Frogmore, Chillington, Beeson and Beesands to the sea, but excluding the villages of Frogmore, Beeson and Beesands. The roads forming the boundary are outside the area.**

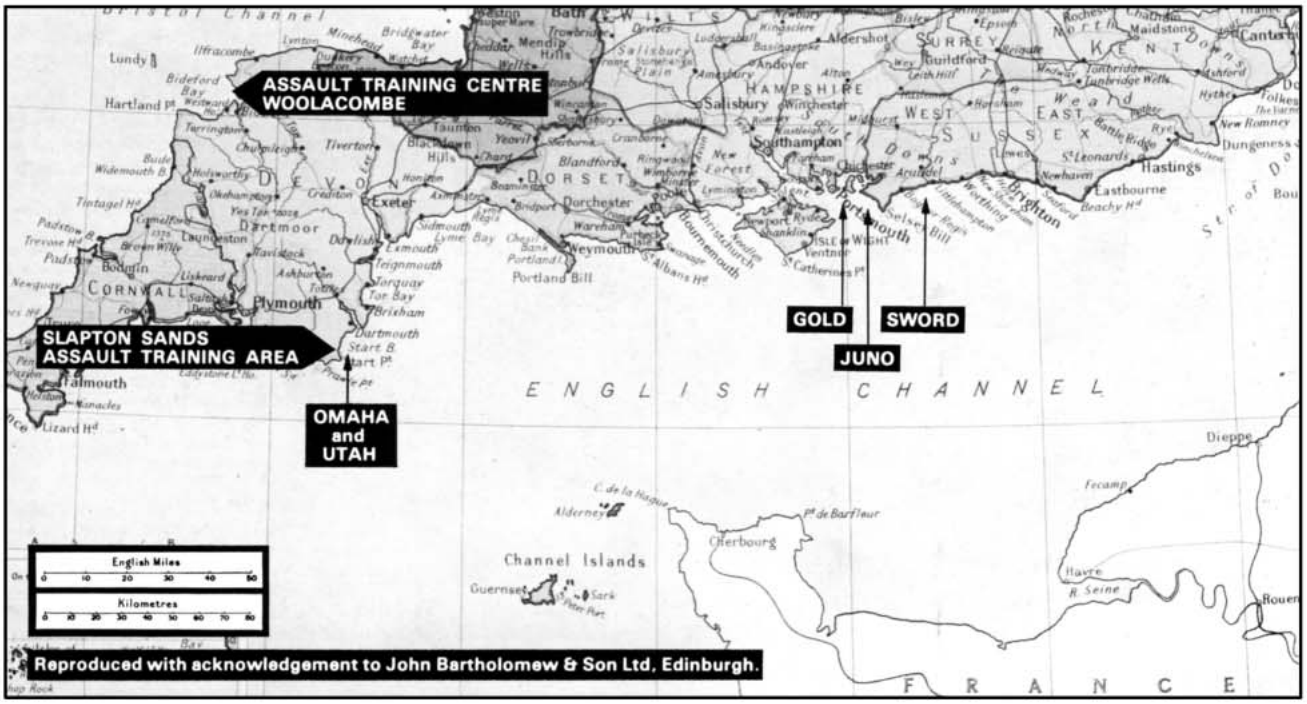
**The parishes involved are the whole, or almost the whole, of Blackawton, East Allington, Sherford, Slapton and Strete, most of Stokenham, and parts of Stoke Fleming, Buckland-tout-Saints and Halwell.**

The invasion of Europe immortalised the date of June 6, 1944 and Normandy thereby earned itself a lasting place in the history books. Less generally known about are the series of mini-D-Days held during March, April and May that year at selected points on the English south coast to test the organisation and logistics, give the assault troops further training and, indirectly, an insight into the ordeal to come. From the lessons learned came the success achieved in Operation Overlord, yet the cost was high — more than tenfold being killed on the practice 'Utah' exercise than in the actual landing itself, when the assault troops met with comparatively little initial opposition nearly a mile south of the prescribed beach.

The story really begins in January 1943 at the meeting between President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill held at Casablanca in North Africa. One outcome of the conference was the setting up of COSSAC (Chief of Staff Supreme Allied Commander) with a headquarters in London (in Norfolk House — *see After the Battle No. 37*) to take over the planning for the invasion of Europe which had commenced the previous September, right after the abortive landing at Dieppe. In the title role was Lieutenant-General Sir Frederick Morgan with Brigadier General Ray Barker of the US Army as his deputy. Crucial to the planning was the choice of a suitable landing area in France — the precise location being thrashed out at a high-powered conference held in Scotland at the Hollywood Hotel, Largs, in June. The limited range and endurance of fighters to give air cover to the landings; the necessity to capture a nearby port early on to reinforce the bridgehead; the level of German defences on their Atlantic Wall — these and many other factors had to be taken into consideration as were the lessons learned in Operation Jubilee at Dieppe. Finally Normandy was agreed upon as best satisfying all the criteria.

Thus one of the most important decisions of the Second World War was made a year before the actual operation could be mounted and the keeping of that secret alone was to be a formidable task. So secret was the classification that it was accorded a designation all of its own — BIGOT. Those officers selected to be informed on a need-to-know basis were classified as 'Bigots' — all copies of 'Bigot' documents being numbered and their distribution closely monitored.

Once the landing beaches on the French coast had been selected, it was essential that stretches of coastline in Britain with similar features be made available for training. General Sir Bernard Montgomery, the designated land force commander for Overlord, had already used the South Hams area of Devon for a military landing exercise in 1938 on Slapton Sands. Ten miles inland lay Dartmoor and the established training areas already used by the Army. With the outbreak of war this area, like much of Britain's coastline, had been shut off to the public with vulnerable landing beaches fortified with




# THE OTHER D-DAYS

mines and barbed wire. The Royal Sands Hotel, an isolated building right on the sea-front at Slapton, had been evacuated in 1939 and closed 'for the duration' but a local farmer's dog named Pincher later set off a mine buried close by, killing himself and demolishing part of the building in the process, thus giving the beach area an already war-torn look.

On November 4, 1943, the Chairman of the Devon County Council, Sir John Daw, received notification from the War Office informing him that the area was being requisitioned under the 1939 Defence Regulations and Compensation Act and had to be totally evacuated by December 20. The regional commissioner, Sir Hugh Elles, who had the responsibility in the south-west of England for co-ordinating any large-scale civilian movements in wartime, for whatever reason, immediately called the relevant parties together for briefings held at the castle in Exeter. The first was attended by the local authorities concerned, including the voluntary organisations, informing them of the scope of the evacuation. They were advised that the Royal Navy would provide men to assist with the setting up of special information centres, and that the Navy would provide a hostel for billeting the army of officials who would be necessary to mastermind the move.

The second meeting was composed of clergy who served the neighbourhood due to be evacated. They were told that a total evacuation of 30,000 acres was to take place at once, involving parts of six parishes, 3,000 people, 180 farms, village shops and other dwellings, concerning 750 families in all. The area involved consisted of a triangle from Torcross to Blackpool Sands and stretching uphill to Blackawton at its apex. It included the villages of Torcross, Slapton, Strete, Blackawton, East Allington, Sherford, Stokenham and Chillington. All farm possessions, animals, agricultural machinery, household goods, indeed anything movable of any value, and as many crops still in the ground as could be saved, were all to be taken away. This enormous task had to be completed in six weeks. The clergy were also informed that the government promised to pay every expense in connection with the evacuation, would give all help in finding temporary accommodation, would pay rents, grant free storage during the period of absence, and that everything would be brought back under the same guarantee while any damage would be repaired and paid for. The clergy were also told that it would be necessary to start the scheme at once for the land was

**The location of the Omaha and Utah practice landing beaches was in the South Hams area of south Devon in south-west England. An assault training area was established behind the beaches flanking Start Bay early in 1944. This shot shows the relief model constructed of the Slapton Sands area being used at a briefing held on January 18. Running diagonally across its surface is the planned boundary between British and American forces. As we are looking at the 'Normandy' invasion beach from the direction of the sea, the British XXX Corps area is on the left and US V Corps on the right. (Signal Corps)**

*Above:* **Truckloads of bunks are unloaded outside the house which is to be the mess hall in Slapton on December 19, 1943. This and the other pictures showing the evacuation of the village were not released by the SHAEF censor until September 1944. (Signal Corps)** *Below:* **Time stands still — 'The Chantry' March 18, 1984.**

due to be handed over to the War Office on December 20 for troop training. They were asked to use their discretion as to whom they told at the moment, as the parishes in question were to be informed officially at special meetings within a few days. The occupation was to last for about six months but it was pointed out that the inhabitants might not be able to return at once since a clearing-up operation would almost certainly be necessary. Having regard, though, to the value of the agricultural land involved, the greatest efforts would be made to reinstate the farmers as soon as possible.

On November 12 — a day after the memorial services for the Armistice of World War I — the Lord Lieutenant of Devon, Lord Fortescue, addressed a meeting held at East Allington church to explain the position to the people, namely that this particular part of the South Hams was to be used for practice for assault landings before a Second Front was opened. Later in the day he held another meeting at Stokenham church. The next day Sir John Daw held similar meetings at Blackawton church and at Slapton village hall and the news was received in the same stunned fashion; all these meetings were also attended by Sir Hugh Elles. It was difficult for some to believe the shattering news, for the area was richly agricultural and the need for home-grown food greater than ever. Many were at a loss to understand why such valuable land should be especially commandeered.

The Ministries of Transport, Labour, Food, Fuel and Power, Pensions and Agriculture were called upon to help with the evacuation, together with the Civil Defence, the Home Guard, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, St John Ambulance Brigade, British Red Cross, Women's Voluntary Service, Voluntary Aid Detachment and other voluntary bodies. The Navy sent thirty photographers and surveyors to inspect and value every acre of land for reference when the occupation should be over.

At a meeting of the Devon County Council on January 6, 1944, the chairman, Sir John Daw, read a letter from Sir Hugh Elles dated December 30, 1943. It expressed admiration for the public-spirited manner in which the local people had responded to the demands made upon them, and placed on record his appreciation of the way in which the difficult task had been handled by the workers concerned. Major Rayner (later Brigadier Sir Ralph Rayner), MP for Totnes Parliamentary Division which included the area in question, had been given special leave to attend the meeting: he stated that he fully shared the view that the compensation under the Defence Act of 1939 would in no way be sufficient. The only course open to those who had the interests of the evacuees at heart would be to

**Local lads watch Private Lee Taylor boil water beside the house, Basil Mitchelmore (left) — then and now. (Signal Corps)**

raise funds by an appeal for voluntary contributions.

To provide focal points to which people could go for help, two Information Centres were set up, one in Blackawton and the other at Stokenham, and these were manned by the Women's Voluntary Service. Notices were posted up at once, telling people where to go for help and advice, and WVS members were sent to every dwelling in the area to make sure that everyone had heard the news and understood that they must make immediate plans to get away as quickly as possible. It had to be explained, over and over again, that it would be criminal to send troops to land in enemy-occupied country as front line men without giving them some experience of what to expect. The organisers were at the Centres from 8.30 a.m. in the morning until 5, 6, or even 7.00 p.m. in the evening, in cold and sometimes difficult conditions. Often many people arrived together; a few would be deaf, or perhaps a little dim-witted so that they could not be made to understand the urgency. Just occasionally someone would be temporarily put out by the whole affair, and one or two were really cantankerous. Never had there been such a need for tact and persuasion, and the helpers were really called upon to give of their best. But there was so much to be done in such a short time that the atmosphere was mostly one of orderly bustle.

The first day at Stokenham, for instance, had an Alice-in-Wonderland air about it, for the Navy, wishing to make sure that the electricity in the hall was up to their stringent requirements, requested the local electricity board to remove their wiring. Then an enormous telephone switchboard was put in. One of the first requests was to Lady Reading — the founder and head of the WVS — for as many boxes, crates and barrels of any size and description as she could possibly get hold of for distribution to the people, one of whose first anxieties was the lack of containers for packing. To the surprise and delight of the helpers, an enormous collection of such articles was put on the train and delivered to the Centre by lorry in such a short time that it was hardly believable. These boxes were handed out to all who needed them at one shilling (5p) a time.

*Left:* **Hands across the sea: the villagers meet the newcomers. L-R: Corporal E. Le Blanc of Novelty, Ohio, Mr C. Mitchelmore, Mr C. H. Steer, Constable W. H. Betts, Pfc Frate from Cleveland, Ohio, and Mr W. H. Blank. (Signal Corps)** *Right:* **Clarence Mitchelmore, who celebrates his ninetieth birthday this year, sportingly relives the past outside his house 'The Arches'.**

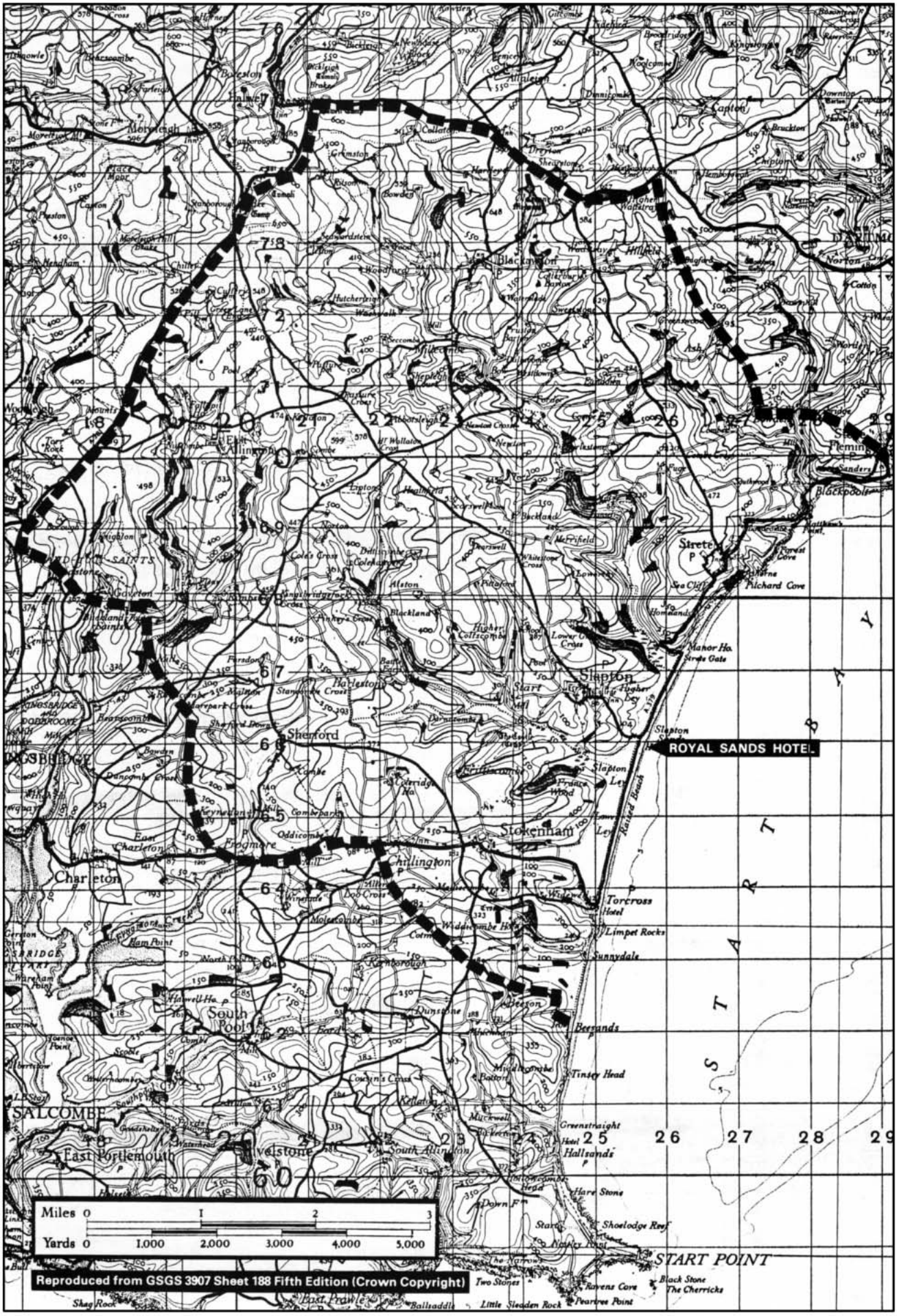
*Above right:* **'We are calling on the people as their war sacrifice to give up their homes and land temporarily for the quartering and Second Front training of the American soldiers' — British Government statement. Aided by Private Kenneth Coan from Cleveland, Ohio, Basil and Denis Mitchelmore leave their parents home. (Signal Corps)** *Right:* **Still living next door to each other in Slapton, they had no idea photographs had been taken of their evacuation to Totnes. This comparison taken March 1984.**

The first questions asked in the Centres were almost routine: 'Where can we go?' 'What can we pack our things in? We haven't even got a suitcase.' 'What about our ration cards?' 'The whole of our winter's coal ration is in the shed — we shan't have to leave it behind shall we?' Many, in the early days of the evacuation, seemed utterly appalled by the difficulties, but those with the greatest problems were the farmers with their stock and crops, fodder, and all kinds of agricultural machinery. Many had to sell whole herds, and if a man had spent nearly a lifetime in building up a particular strain it was a heart-breaking business. Two special cattle sales were held at Kingsbridge, but after the second one it was realised that it would be useless to try any more as the local market had now been flooded. The RSPCA had the unhappy task in having, for one reason or another, to put down many well beloved family pets. Many cats and dogs were transported to new temporary homes but even so some of these, particularly the cats, made quite long journeys to come back to familiar surroundings. One such cat survived all the subsequent bombings and managed to remain near his old home until his mistress returned a year later. The Americans, when they arrived, quickly adopted any strays they came across, feeding and looking after them until they, too, had to leave. The RSPCA also had to deal with a request by one woman for something to be given to her several cats to put them to sleep for a longish train journey. The official had to explain to her that such temporary sleep was impossible and that what he could give would be for ever, a fact which she accepted with a certain amount of indignation!

Besides the well-being of the people and their livestock, the welfare of the six parish churches, all but one of which were pre-Reformation and had many treasures, caused much anxiety. Slapton, Blackawton, East Allington, Sherford and Stokenham were all ancient and beautiful buildings; the one at Strete being the only so-called modern one, having been built during the last century. Stokenham served both Torcross and Chillington. The Admiralty informed the Ecclesiastical Commissioners that it was impossible to guarantee the safety of any of these churches so an ecclesiastical sculptor from Exeter was called in to suggest what could be done. With his foreman and an American commander he toured each church in turn and recommended that any portable treasures such as silver candlesticks, crosses, crucifixes, vestments and other items should be taken away altogether by the churchwardens and stored elsewhere. Valuable but immovable items such as pulpits, fonts, monuments and tombs, windows and doors,

*Above:* **Pints all round at the local — The Queens Arms. On the following day, December 6, a 'closed for the duration' notice was posted on the pub door. With Corporal Le Blanc and Private Coan are the landlady, Mrs Lavers, Mr A. Tabb (with the cap) and Mr H. W. Trowt. (Signal Corps)** *Below:* **All three civilians have since died and we failed to trace the present whereabouts of the Americans. Only the beer and the memories remain.**

**We did manage to trace Corporal Edward Gnatowski still living in Cleveland, Ohio. He hopes to return to Slapton during the fortieth anniversary celebrations in June 1984. The church he will find little changed and in the churchyard the grave of the Reverend Arthur Mills, vicar at Slapton since 1924 who died on January 24, 1945 aged 84.**


ROYAL SANDS HOTEL
START BAY
START POINT
Miles 0 1 2 3
Yards 0 1,000 2,000 3,000 4,000 5,000
Reproduced from GSGS 3907 Sheet 188 Fifth Edition (Crown Copyright)

*Above:* **Embarkation for Operation Duck — the first large-scale landing at Slapton. The sectional concrete block loading ramp was just one of many 'chocolate box' slipways constructed right across south-west England by US Army engineers. (Signal Corps)** *Below:* **The location was beside the Higher Ferry slipway at Dartmouth. In the storms of February 1984, just before our comparison was taken, the ferry's wire guide cables snapped sweeping it downstream to crash into yachts near Kingswear.** *Bottom:* **The American ramp was removed after the war but traces still remain.**

should be heavily sandbagged, and the work was to begin at once.

American help was promised but the first two churches were finished by the sculptor, his foreman and another workman working entirely alone before the men arrived. One of their biggest tasks was to ensure that a tremendous amount of old woodwork was safely packed in straw in wooden boxes. These very old carvings were mostly from the fifteenth-century chancel screens which are a feature of many Devon churches — 'brittle as gingerbread some of them', as the foreman put it. Most had been attacked by woodworm, but they were all so beautiful and so well worth preserving that the utmost skilled attention was given to handling them. Organs, arches, and much stonework had also to be sandbagged, boardings had to be erected where practical, and finally the whole property locked and secured with barbed wire. On each church's principal gate was fastened the following notice:

To our Allies of the U.S.A.

This church has stood here for several hundred years. Around it has grown a community, which has lived in these houses and tilled these fields ever since there was a church. This church, this churchyard in which their loved ones lie at rest, these homes, these fields are as dear to those who have left them as are the homes and graves and fields which you, our Allies, have left behind you. They hope to return one day, as you hope to return to yours, to find them waiting to welcome them home. They entrust them to your care meanwhile, and pray that God's blessing may rest upon us all.

Charles,
Bishop of Exeter.

During the last week or two of the evacuation, sentries appeared and all tradesmen were forbidden to enter. Some American officials, already installed in their headquarters at the Manor House, Dittisham, appeared in the early part of December, anxious lest the exodus should not be finished in time. Finally, volunteers were sent to inspect every village, to make sure that everyone had gone, that each house or cottage was properly secured and that all was in readiness to be officially handed over to the American authorities.

Having a low shelving beach, with access to the hinterland restricted by a large area of water and marsh, the Slapton Assault

*Above:* **First troops ashore in Operation Duck have hit White Beach at the northern end of Slapton Sands.** *Below:* **Second assault wave approaches. (Signal Corps)**

Training Area certainly possessed similarities to the Utah landing beach which also had inundations behind the beach in 1944. In fact the whole training area, with its narrow winding lanes bordered by high banks, has close similarity to the Normandy bocage country which typifies the western end of the lodgement area in France. The units of the US First Army which were to carry out the American assault were already stationed right across the Devon-Dorset area and Slapton Sands was used by both the Utah and Omaha assault forces for training.

Normally control of the waters of the English Channel is divided up between the Home Commanders-in-Chief at Plymouth, Portsmouth and the Nore, covering the western, central and eastern sectors respectively. The Slapton Assault Training Area fell within the sector commanded by Admiral Sir Ralph Leatham at Plymouth and he appreciated that problems might arise over the exercising of American forces, from both the Army and Navy, within his sphere of operations. The US naval forces concerned were designated the Eleventh Amphibious Force with Rear Admiral John L. Hall, USN, at the helm, and just prior to the first large scale exercise to be held in the western Channel area, Admiral Leatham clarified his position to the American commander. His letter to Rear Admiral Hall was dated January 1, 1944:

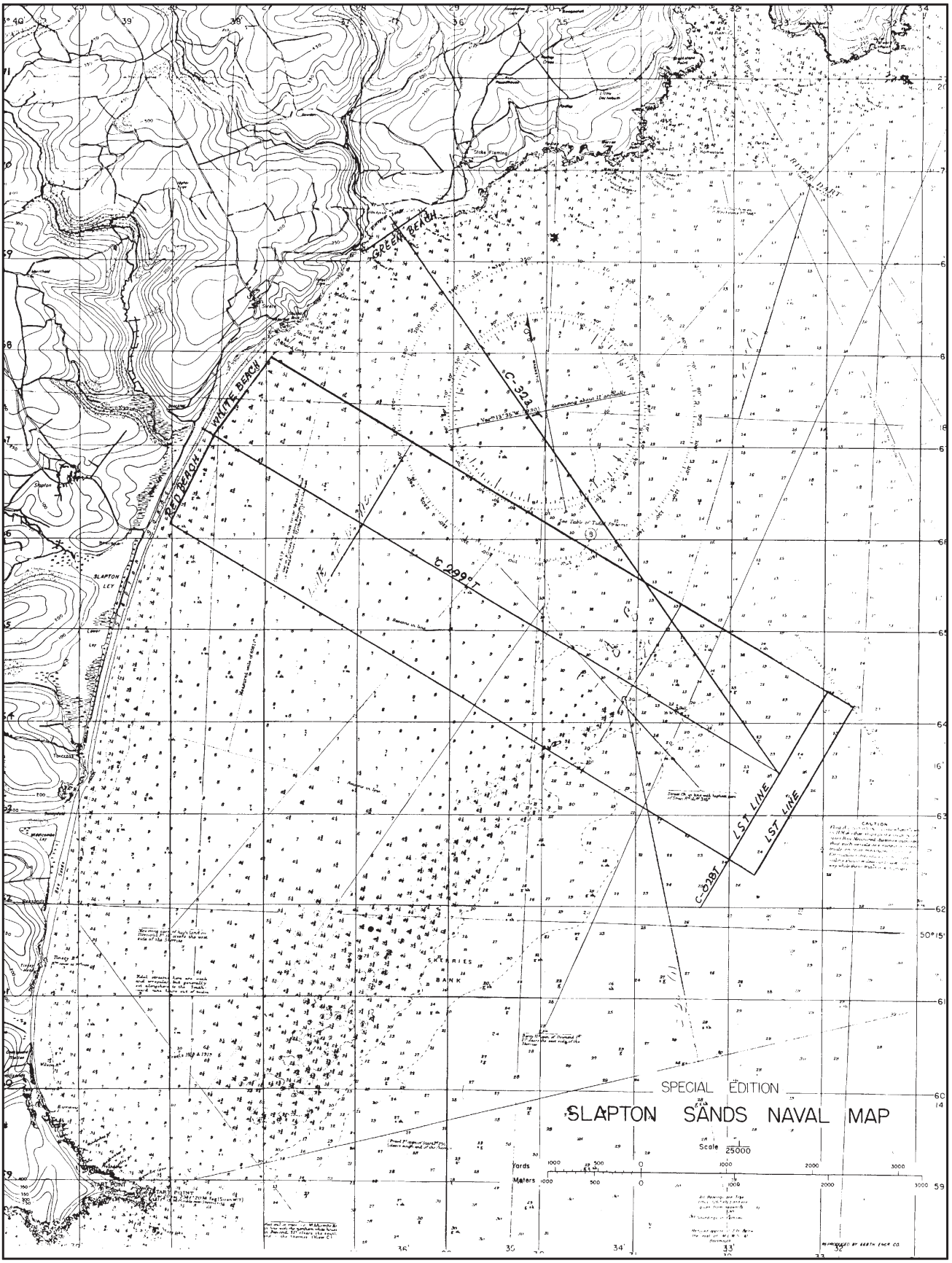
'As Operation Duck is the first large scale exercise undertaken by U.S. Forces in the Plymouth Command, I feel it is desirable to put on record my view of the relations in which you and I stand during the execution of the operation.

'Broadly speaking I apply the customs and traditions of the British service, which I believe accord closely with yours. And I regard you in exactly the same light as any British flag officer in command of a British force operating within my command.

'It is my conception, therefore, that from the time of leaving Falmouth you are in tactical control of your forces, including the British vessels forming the close escort.

'Should I have any information of enemy attack by E-boat, submarine or air, it will be passed to you to take such action as you may think fit. I regard myself free to suggest action if necessary.

'I consider it is within your discretion to modify or cancel the exercise on account of weather or other causes. I myself retain full




**Blackpool Sands is a small sandy cove at the most northern end of the training area, separated from Slapton Sands by the cliffs at Strete. When included in operations it became Green Beach. This plan was prepared for Lieutenant-Commander L. M. Bailliere of Task Force 124 by the Eleventh Amphibian Force under Rear Admiral John L. Hall in January 1944.** *Opposite top:* **One wonders if this double-handling was part of the quartermasters plan for Operation Duck: offloading petrol-filled jerrycans over the side into a DUKW instead of taking the easy way by truck straight down the ramp onto the beach. (Signal Corps)** *Opposite bottom:* **We established that the picture had been taken towards the southern end of Green Beach looking at Beach Cottage. Visitors to the sands today will find one of the huge chocolate box 'hards' in use as a car park. We were told it was constructed after the war using parts from the dismantled slipway at Kingswear (see page 6).**

**A few short weeks later these same men will be doing it for real on the coast of France in the face of the guns of the enemy; today it is under the peaceful gaze of the Royal Navy. (Signal Corps)**

control of the covering forces throughout the operation unless or until otherwise ordered. You will of course be kept informed.

'I also retain an overriding control, should there arise circumstances which render it strategically necessary for me to cancel or curtail the exercise. I cannot at present see any likelihood of such circumstances arising.'

Rear Admiral Hall passed on a copy of the letter to his chief, Rear Admiral Alan G. Kirk, USN, of United States Fleet Task Force 122, landlocked at 15 Grosvenor Square, London. After further discussion the principles to be observed during training exercises at Slapton were promulgated in Plymouth Command War Order No. 138 dated February 28, 1944. As far as the Neptune forces were concerned (Neptune being the code-name for operations within Overlord and used for security reasons after September 1943 on all Overlord planning papers which referred to the target area and date of the landings), Rear Admiral Kirk was commander of the Western Naval Task Force operating with the American First Army (the Eastern Naval Task Force being responsible for the British Second Army).

After Operation Duck the next major exercise was Operation Beaver held at Slapton from March 27-31 in which VII Corps' element was under the direction of Major General J. Lawton Collins who was to command the corps on D-Day. Spearheading the assault was the 4th Infantry Division who came ashore at 9.00 a.m. on March 29 to seize the bridgehead and cover the landing and advance inland across Dartmoor to capture an imaginary Cherbourg at Okehampton. Five hours previously the 101st Airborne Division did a 'GMC' jump behind the beach, simulating their actual role for D-Day — only on this occasion their 'jump' was out of the back of GMC trucks! The airborne units concerned left their staging areas by road and rail on March 26-27, were briefed on the following day and at sunset on the 29th were marched or transported to their 'drop zones', being scattered as they would on the actual operation. During that night the mission of the 502nd Airborne Infantry was to capture the causeway bridges leading inland, just as in the actual Overlord plan, and secure the north flank of the bridgehead, while the 506th took up positions on the southern side. A naval bombardment preceded the actual landing and troops used live ammunition in designated areas from which other troops had been excluded.

**Where once the troops pushed on inland from Red Beach, a memorial now stands to the people of South Hams who made it all possible.**

The exercise was far from successful: coordination between units broke down and the men who took part remember it mainly for the confusion. A series of conferences were held with an all day critique at Hamoaze House, Devonport, on April 2 to attempt to iron out the problems before the next training exercise, already scheduled for April 23-30, took place. This was Operation Tiger and it was to be the biggest yet. The commander of Force U (standing for Utah) was Rear Admiral Don P. Moon, USN, and his flagship for the exercise was to be the USS *Augusta* thus giving an opportunity to test the cruiser's operational capability for its key role as the command ship for American forces on D-Day itself. (As from April 1, Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, RN, the Allied Naval Commander with full authority over the 7,000-odd vessels engaged in Neptune, had assumed operational control of the Western Naval Task Force.)

*Above:* **The Ley at Slapton has always been a breeding ground for wildlife. Before the war when this picture was taken, the 20-room 7/6 (37½p) per night Royal Sands Hotel, right on the beach in the foreground, provided convenient accommodation for fishermen and wildfowlers, whose gunfire echoed across the surrounding countryside. (Aerofilms)** *Below:* **The hotel had been severely damaged when a local dog set off six mines. Although it lay just to the south of Red Beach, it already had a war-torn look when it became 'enemy headquarters' for Operation Beaver. This picture was taken on March 14 just prior to the exercise but the building has already been virtually demolished by naval gunfire. (Signal Corps)**

Operation Beaver was held from March 27-31. Here troops pass the ruin of the hotel marching northward along the coast road.

(Signal Corps) Today nothing remains, the building having been cleared away to make room for a car park.

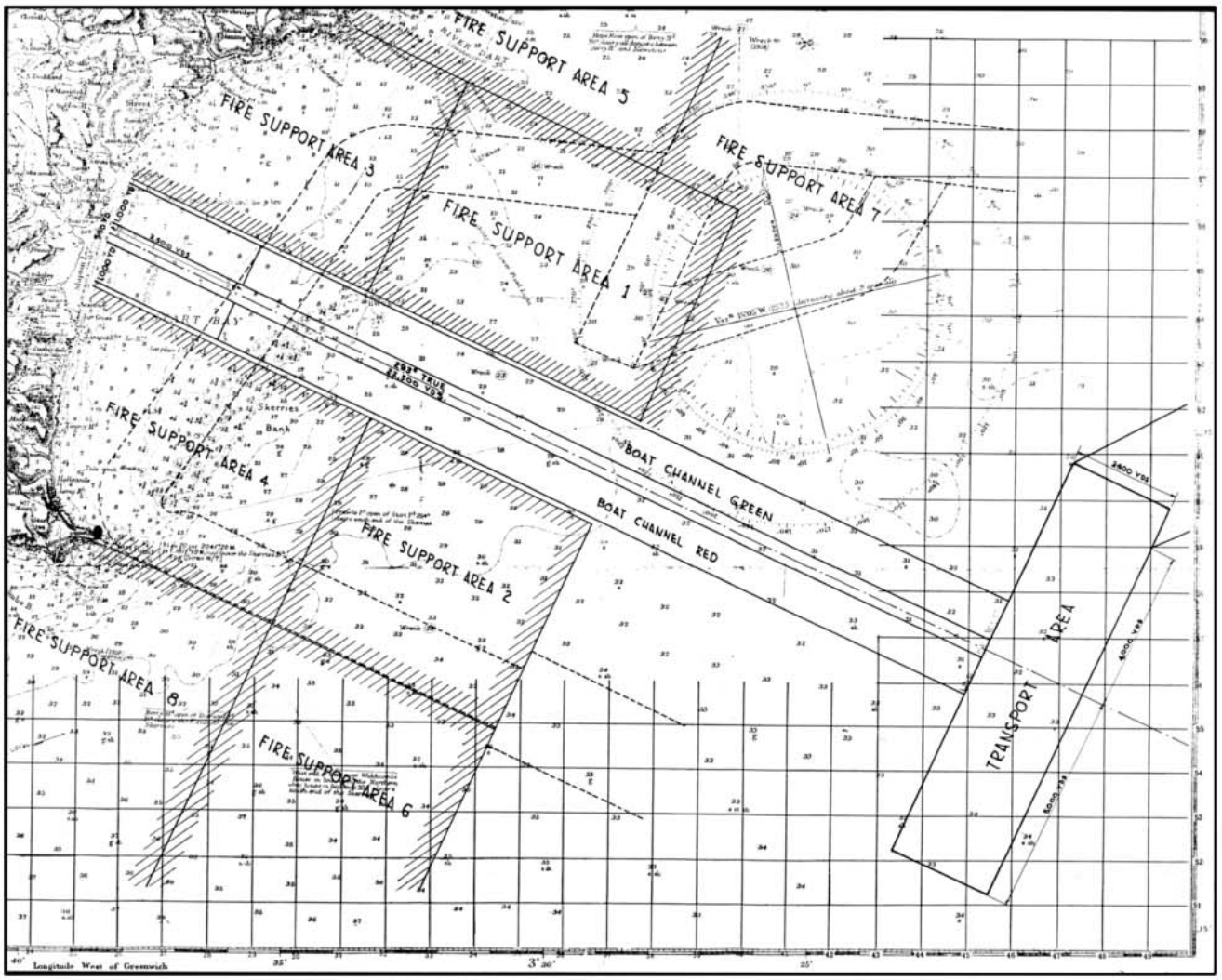
The reedy Higher Ley gave the opportunity to practise crossing marshy ground similar to that which would be encountered at

the real Utah beach. (Signal Corps) The only change has been caused by the removal of hedgerows by 'prairie' farmers.

**To the Allied navies the operations at the Slapton Assault Training Area were just exercises but to the German naval forces they gave immense opportunity to hit out at the mass of shipping along the English south coast, much of it comprising slow, lumbering transports. Kapitän zur See Rudolf Petersen had already been awarded the Knight's Cross for actions in 1940; his 1944 exploit would bring him the addition of the Oakleaves, his weapon being the torpedo-armed Schnellboote. (Bundesarchiv)**

With all the naval activity in the Channel it was realised by the Allied commanders that the enemy would be bound to detect the operations, but it was hoped that the frequent massing of invasion craft only to be later dispersed, would further help confuse the Germans and help Allied deception plans. Nevertheless German naval forces were still very active in 'Der Kanal' — not the capital ships which by then had all been sent to their watery graves or confined to port — but the motor torpedo boats of Kapitän zur See Rudolf Petersen who, as Führer des Schnellboote, controlled all such operations in the Channel and North Sea from his headquarters at Wimereux near Boulogne. German S-Boats were, and, indeed are still, more commonly referred to in British and American literature by the generic term E-Boats ('E' standing for enemy). The 5th Schnellboote Flotilla, then operating out of Guernsey, had already tasted victory in Lyme Bay when *S-65* and *S-85* attacked convoys PW300 and WP300 on the night of February 26/27, 1943. The two

**For Operation Tiger (April 23-30) Blackpool beach was not used, the main assault landing fairly and squarely on Slapton Sands.**



**The Bayfield, originally called Sea Bass, was a 7,650-ton attack-type transport which acted as command ship for Task Force 125 for Tiger. Here a waterproofed jeep is swung aboard on April 25 at Plymouth. (Signal Corps)**

convoys were due to pass each other around 2.00 a.m. and of the fourteen vessels comprising WP300, four were sunk with no loss to the attacking force. German S-Boats waged a very successful campaign against Allied merchant convoys in the Channel area over the following months, one notable sinking being the Norwegian destroyer HMS *Eskdale* escorting a convoy on the night of April 13/14, 1943. With the opening of the Slapton Assault Training Area in January 1944, and the general build-up of lumbering invasion craft in the weeks before D-Day, the chances of meeting with Allied shipping increased, and on the night of April 27-28, Petersen's forces were ready to exact their most successful killing of the entire war.

While the debate over the failings of Operation Beaver went on, planning Operation Tiger went ahead full steam. D-Day at Slapton was to be April 27 with H-Hour at 7.30 a.m. Final briefings were held in the Royal Marine Barracks at Plymouth during April 21-24, attended also by Brigadier General Elwood Quesada, Commanding General of Ninth Air Support Command.

Operating order No. 2-44 of April 18, 1944 stated that: 'the force will firmly establish VII Corps in position north of Start Point in order (1) to ensure the capture of Okehampton with minimum delay, and (2) to assist in securing a lodgment area as a base for further operations leading to capture of the Devonshire southern coast ports. Attack by enemy aircraft, submarines, and E-Boats may be expected en route to and in exercise area. Friendly aircraft will fly over exercise area in operational flights. Units from 101st Airborne Division will participate by simulating landing west of Slapton Sands Range area at about H–4 hours . . . The 9th Air Support Command will provide direct air support . . . The covering force consists of the Tribal destroyers HMS *Haida* HMS *Huron*, HMS *Ashanti*, HMS *Athabaskan*, and coastal forces of Plymouth Command. Commander Task Force 125 in *Bayfield*. Second in command Captain Richardson in *LCH-95*. Commanding Generals VII Corps, 4th Infantry Division, in *Bayfield*'.

Tiger was to be the first major exercise in which the searched channels were purposely extended and complicated in order to better simulate operational conditions in which several 'build-up' convoys were scheduled to follow the assault phase. Soon after Major General Raymond O. Barton, the Commanding General of the 4th Division, arrived on board at 9.30 a.m. on April 26, *Bayfield*, an assault or attack transport, slipped its mooring and proceeded downstream, anchoring in Plymouth Sound to take on Major General Collins and his staff. Shortly after 5.30 p.m. she set course for Tor Bay, accompanied by *LCH* 95 and *LCH 86*. Meanwhile the *Augusta* had set sail with the top brass, including Rear Admiral Kirk, who had come down from London in his role as Commander Task Force 122, and Major Generals Lewis H. Brereton and Ralph Royce, commander and deputy commander of the Ninth Air Force. At 10.45 p.m. the *Bayfield* convoy rendezvoused with the USS *Barnett*, USS *Joseph T. Dickman*, and HMS *Empire Gauntlet* and proceeded with *Barnett* leading through a U-shaped swept channel towards the Transport Area, 11¼ miles off Slapton Sands.

At 4.03 a.m. next morning General Quarters was sounded and the *Bayfield* anchored off Start Bay and began lowering her assault craft. Major General Collins had already departed in one of them when Captain Richardson, commander of the Green Assault Group, reported that some of his LCTs were behind schedule and that he recommended postponing H-Hour to 8.30 a.m. As Collins could not be contacted, Admiral Moon could not discuss the importance of the missing

**Being located in the south-west of England, the training area was ideally situated with many sheltered harbours and anchorages along this part of the coastline. This is LCT 975 on the River Dart, setting sail on April 26 for Operation Tiger. It is interesting to see that the ship is under Royal Navy command. (Signal Corps)** *Below:* **Dartmouth Higher Ferry nears the western bank.**

LCTs with him, and was compelled to act without the corps commanders' advice. He decided to issue instructions that H-Hour be put back one hour but some units and ships failed to receive the revised instructions. The second assault wave landed on Green Beach at the original time and consequently the artillery bombardment and air support had to be cancelled for the safety of the troops.

After this initial set back the landings proceeded more or less as planned, the unloading of troops and supplies continuing throughout the day. By 3.30 p.m. the beachhead was considered secure and the *Bayfield*, having been visited during the morning by Admiral Kirk, moved closer inshore to observe the situation. That evening most of the commanders returned to the ship, anchored eight miles off the beach, to confer.

At 9.45 a.m. Convoy T4, one of the follow up convoy groups carrying tanks for Red Beach, set sail from Plymouth. In the lead, acting as escort, was the corvette HMS *Azalea* followed about 2,000 yards astern by *LST 515*. Thereafter at 600 yard intervals came *LSTs 496*, *511*, *531* and *58* (towing two pontoon causeways). The old WW1 destroyer HMS *Scimitar* had been detailed to act as main escort and mark one of the turning points in the route to Start Bay but during the night of D-1 she was rammed by *LCI(L) 324* and holed forward on the port side. Although the damage when inspected at Plymouth the following day was well above the waterline, dockyard repairs could not begin until the 28th and she was ordered to remain in port. Due to a confusion in notifying higher command, no orders were issued for a replacement to be provided. This was a significant factor in the disaster which was to follow, as admitted in Admiral Leatham's report:

'This decision [to keep the *Scimitar* in port] was made without reference to the Staff Officer principally concerned, who was, in fact, under the impression that Com Force "U" and Senior Officer Escorts were aware of the damage and had ordered *Scimitar* to return to Plymouth. Consequently it was not till about 1930 hours that the true situation began to become clear, and in this connection it will be observed that *Scimitar's* signal timed 270742, received in A.C.H.Q. about 1015/27 [i.e. 10.15 p.m. on April 27], should have been addressed to Com Force "U" (R) Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, instead of being addressed to the Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, and, I regret, not repeated to Com Force "U" [Commander Force U].

'At 1930/27 the Staff Officer concerned realised that something was amiss but was still acting under the erroneous impression referred to above . . . Shortly afterwards he sent for the captain of the *Scimitar* and then, fully realising the true situation, he made my 272306, a copy of which is also attached. My 272306 was apparently decoded and delivered to the captain of *Tanatside* [Senior Officer Escorts] about 0045/28. The captain of *Tanatside* took immediate action to detail HMS *Saladin* as relief escort for Convoy T-4, and *Saladin* left Start Bay at 0137/28.'

However by then it was too late. Although the Admiral had provided a line of vessels between Start Point and Portland Bill to protect the entire operation, and had also positioned three MTBs off Cherbourg to intercept any 'E-boats' departing from their base, S-Boats of the 5th and 9th Schnellboote Flotillas managed to leave the port, evade the British MTBs, and break through the defensive screen. Already readied for that night's operation by the 5th Flotillenchef, Korvettenkapitän Klug, were six of his best boats. Each 35-metre S-Boat carried a complement of 21. Armament varied but usually consisted of two or three 20mm cannons, sometimes one 37mm or 4cm gun, and twin 21-inch fixed torpedo tubes facing forwards with two reloads. The triple-shaft Daimler-Benz diesels gave a top speed of up to 35 knots with a range of 700 miles. Detailed

**Safely ashore at last but as men of the 1st Infantry Division's Headquarters Company moved inland past the ruins of the Royal Sands, a convoy was setting out from Plymouth bringing reinforcements. Joining with other ships en route, Convoy T4 was steaming headlong into disaster.**

**LST 507. Laid down September 8, 1943 at Jeffersonville by the Jeffersonville Boat & Machine Company in Indiana, she was launched on November 16 and commissioned on January 10, 1944. Here she is seen crossing the Atlantic on March 10. Exactly seven weeks later she would be sent to the bottom by a German torpedo during Operation Tiger. (National Archives)**

under order Gkdos 2268 A 1 were *S-100*, commanded by Obersteuermann Berkenhagen, and *S-143* under Oberleutnant zur See Schmölzer, forming Rotte 1. Formation or Rotte 2 comprised *S-140* (Oberleutnant zur See Goetschke) and *S-142* (Oberleutnant zur See Ahrens). Rotte 3 consisted of *S-136* under Kapitänleutnant Jurgenmeyer, leading the operation, and *S-138* captained by Oberleutnant zur See Stohwasser. Jurgenmeyer, Stohwasser and Berkenhagen all had supercharged engines in their boats, increasing the horse-power from 4,500 to 6,000 and the top speed by four knots.

Kapitänleutnant Freiherr von Mirbach, Flotillenchef of the 9th Schnellboote Flotilla, had detailed three of his boats to join in the operation. In *S-130* Oberleutnant zur See Rabe was in charge, while *S-145* and *S-150*, both with uprated engines enabling them to top 40 knots, were captained by Oberleutnants zur See Schirren and Behr respectively.

The seven S-Boats departed from Cherbourg at 10.00 p.m. in two columns in line astern, travelling at 36 knots. Radio silence was maintained and the direction-finding equipment was not switched on in case the signals were picked up and the position of the force betrayed.

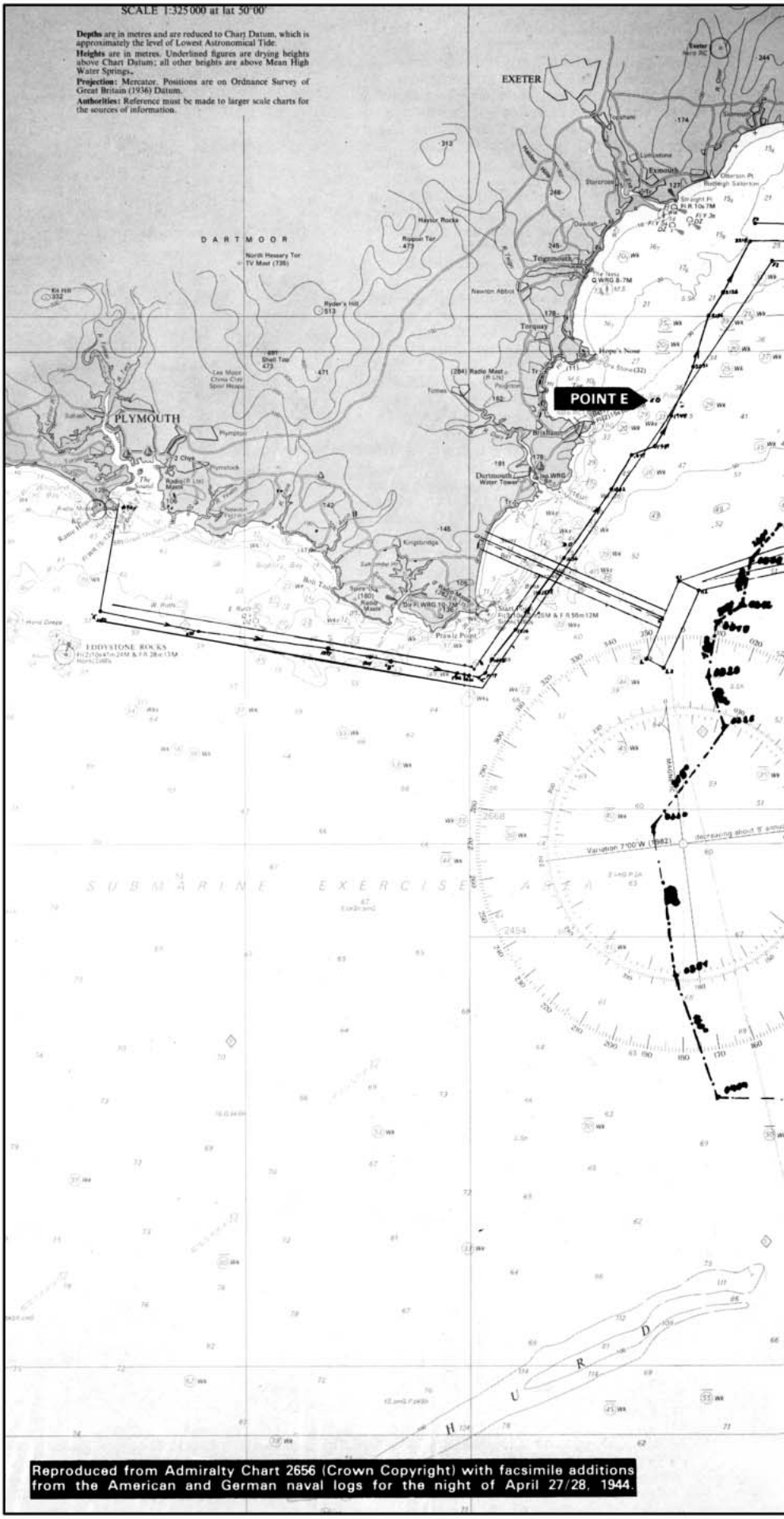
Meanwhile the convoy, steaming slowly eastwards at 4 knots on its designated track, had reached point E (*see map*) at 8.30 p.m. where it was joined by the Brixham section (Diagram 1 *see page 18*) comprising Green LST Unit No. 3 — *LSTs 499, 289, 507* and *508* (although it is believed the latter failed to make the rendezvous). Visibility was 15,000 yards with a calm sea. By 1.00 a.m. on April 28 the convoy was steaming on a bearing of 145 degrees and was at a point some 14½ miles from Portland Bill. The S-Boat tactics, as recalled by the captain of *LST 58*, John Wachter, appeared to consist of approaching the ships from both sides at once, the S-Boat on the port side firing flares to outline the ships.

Pinpointing the position of the convoy from France by radio location, Kapitän zur See Petersen had radioed through the bearing of a possible target in map square BF2398. At 11.17 p.m. the S-Boats split up to attack in pairs. At one minute past midnight (German time) Formation 3 (*S-136 and 138*) spotted what they identified as two destroyers moving west at seven knots. *S-138* fired a double salvo of torpedoes at the stern of the right-hand ship at a range of 2,000 metres while *S-136* launched single torpedoes at the leading 'destroyer'. After a torpedo running time of 100 seconds *S-138* saw a hit on the rearmost ship in line with the second funnel. A minute later *S-136* observed the simultaneous detonation of both her torpedoes after having run only 40 seconds. Still misidentifying the Allied ships as destroyers, both S-Boats fired two linked single shots at the 'destroyer' which was attempting to close the crippled ship.

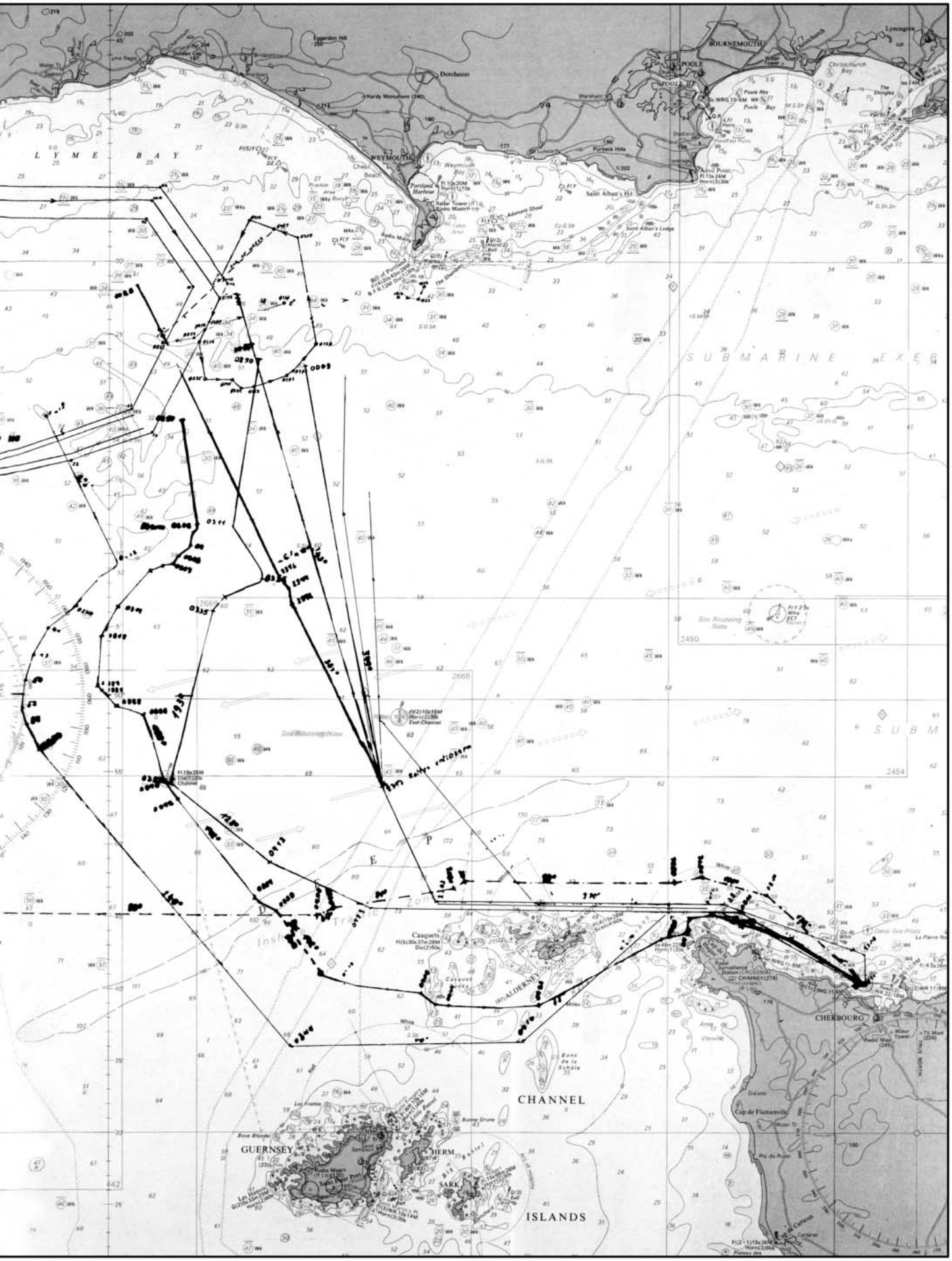
Meanwhile Formation 2 (*S-140* and *142*) had opened fire with double-shots at 1,400 metres. The fact that all torpedoes missed led Oberleutnant zur See Goetschke on *S-140* to assume, rightly of course, that the ships were probably shallow-draught tank landing craft. Instead, fire was opened with the 4cm guns, each boat firing some sixty rounds with noticeable effect.

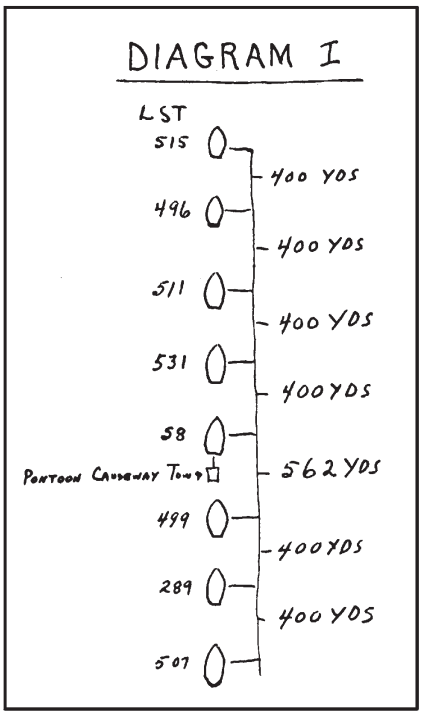
At the same time the *S-100* and *S-145* of Rotte 1 had reached the scene guided by red tracers they had spotted to the north. One ship, reported as a large tanker, was already burning brightly covering the bay in dense black smoke, and there was random firing in all directions. Approaching to within 1,500 metres, both S-Boats fired two shots, a torpedo hit on a 1,500-ton ship being observed after a run of 76 seconds.

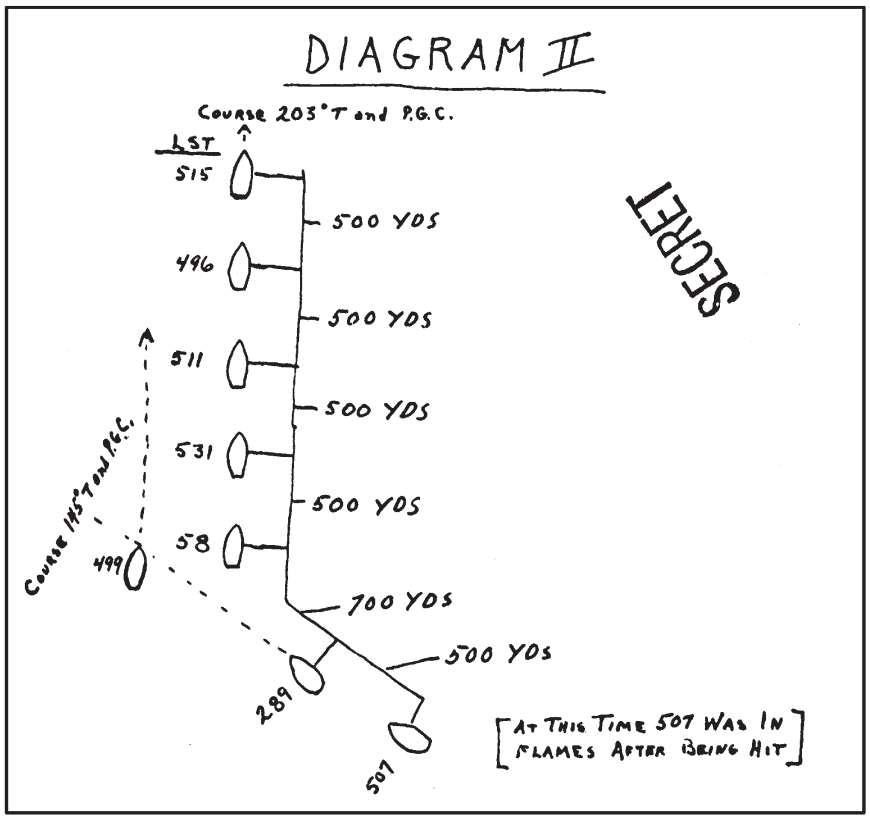
John Watchter on *LST 58* continues the story: 'At 0133 gunfire directed at convoy was seen bearing 165 degrees Relative (apparently


SCALE 1:325 000 at lat 50°00'
Depths are in metres and are reduced to Chart Datum, which is approximately the level of Lowest Astronomical Tide.
Heights are in metres. Underlined figures are drying heights above Chart Datum; all other heights are above Mean High Water Springs.
Projection: Mercator. Positions are on Ordnance Survey of Great Britain (1936) Datum.
Authorities: Reference must be made to larger scale charts for the sources of information.
EXETER
DARTMOOR
PLYMOUTH
POINT E
EDDYSTONE ROCKS
SUBMARINE EXERCISE AREA

Reproduced from Admiralty Chart 2656 (Crown Copyright) with facsimile additions from the American and German naval logs for the night of April 27/28, 1944.


L Y M E B A Y
WEYMOUTH
Portland Harbour
Portland Bill
Dorchester
Hardy Monument (240)
Eggardon Hill
BOURNEMOUTH
POOLE
Lymington
Christchurch Bay
Purbeck Hills
Saint Alban's Hd
Saint Alban's Ledge
Admiralty Shoal
The Shambles
Radio Mast
Radar Tower
Radio Masts
Arrival Point
Poole Rks
Poole Bay
The Shingles
S U B M A R I N E E X E R
See Routeing Note
2459
2668
2454
Casquets
Casquets
Casquets




**The diagrams were drawn by Captain John Wachter on LST 58 who was well placed in the convoy to describe the attack. (US Navy)**

AA guns firing to draw fire from convoy). At 0133½ General Quarters was sounded, and the Captain took the conn and assumed his station on the super conn. Some of this gunfire passed over *LST 58* and hit water on the port side 400-600 yards distant. No hits were reported. We did not order "Open Fire" at this time, because the target could not be seen and we did not want to reveal our position to the enemy.

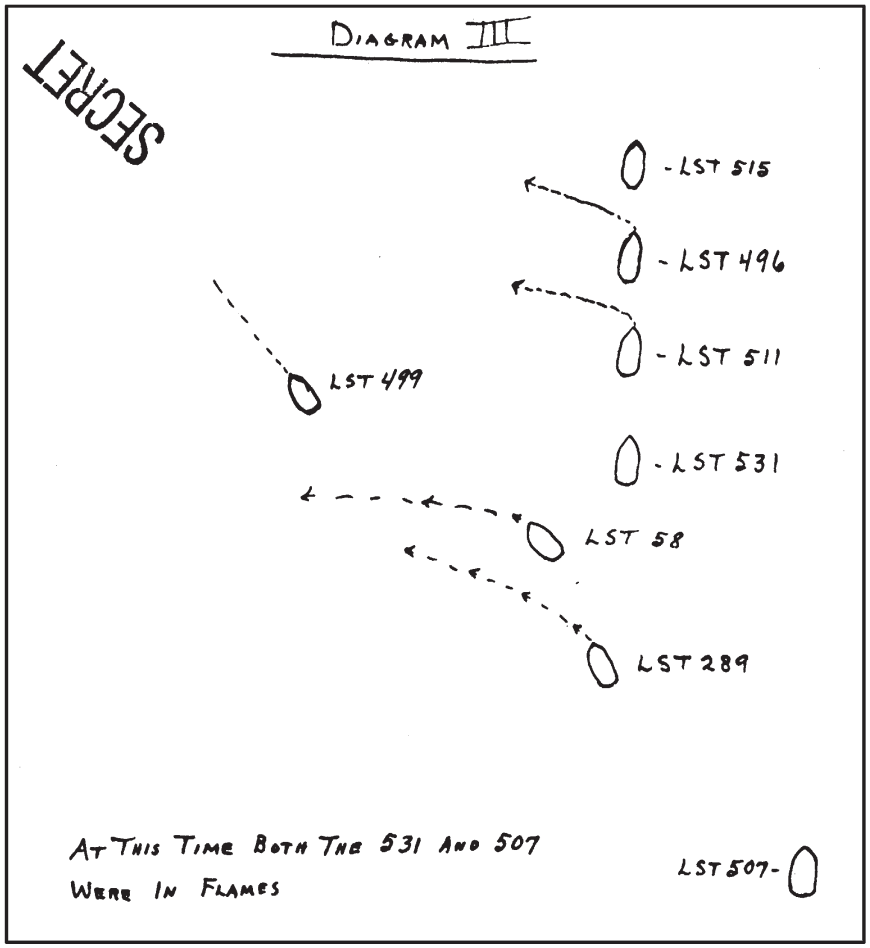
'At 0202 convoy changed course to 203 degrees. At approximately the same time an explosion was heard astern, and flames were seen from the last ship in convoy (Diagram II), *LST 507*.

'Just prior to the time of the explosion, *LST 499* sheared to port and moved up on the port beam of *LST 58* about 300 yards distant. (Diagram III). With *LST 499* on our port beam, a pontoon causeway in tow, fire from *507* on our starboard quarter illuminating the entire area and motors (presumed to be enemy E-Boats) on the starboard side, maneuvering was practically impossible. It was also thought wise to stay together for better protection of the convoy as a whole. (Diagram IV).

'At about 0215, *LST 531* opened fire (apparently at the enemy although at this time we saw no target). At 0217 the *531* was hit and exploded 400 yards dead ahead. It now was felt wise to scatter and proceed individually. We maneuvered in attempt to change course and speed as quickly as possible without backing down and to keep clear of the ship on the port beam and the fires from explosions and enemy E-Boats heard coming in on the starboard side. As soon as practicable all engines were ordered ahead at emergency flank speed. (Diagram V).

'At 2224 an engine was heard on port beam. We maneuvered in an effort to place the sound of the motors between the light of the fire and our ship. At 0225 an E-Boat was sighted coming toward ship at about 265 degrees Relative. Four 40mm and six 20mm guns opened fire at 0225 when the E-Boat was sighted. First tracers were seen at about 260 degrees Relative. Last tracers at "Cease Fire" were about 230 degrees Relative. Range at open fire was about 1,500 yards — range at last shot appeared approximately 2,000 yards. Total 20mm rounds expended was 323, total 40mm 68. It was believed from tracers, although unconfirmed, that fire from *LST 58* showered the E-Boat. Gunfire was exceptionally accurate as the E-Boat had to turn outboard. It then disappeared.

'At 0230 *LST 289* was hit. At 0231 *LST 289* opened fire (we did not see her target). At 0237 First Lieutenant (Ensign H. M. Turner) and the bow lookout reported hearing a torpedo pass our bow close to the surface. During this action we maneuvered, by using



**When this picture was taken on March 3, no one knew that within four weeks she would be involved in what could well be called the first battle of the invasion of Europe. LST 289 had her stern blown off by a Schnellboote torpedo but she survived. (National Archives)**

full rudder, to keep any reported motors either dead ahead or dead astern to present the smallest target surface.

'At 0239 the order was given to cast off pontoon causeway tow. There were no ships astern, and it was felt the maneuverability would be increased sufficiently to warrant it. Some difficulty was experienced with the winch holding the cable jamming and there was delay carrying out this order.

'From 0237 until 0400 bright magnesium flares were sighted in various directions. They were apparently intended to keep us from making directly toward the nearest shore. We zig-zagged en route to Chesil Cove. In order to do so, it was necessary to veer eastward in efforts to avoid flares and numerous engine noises on the port side. At 0300 the tow was cast off. At 0302 an E-Boat was momentarily sighted in the light of a bright flare bearing 010 degrees Relative about 1½ to 2 miles distant. At the same time an engine was reported heard off the port quarter. At frequent intervals motor noises were reported from both bow and stern. They were definitely identified as powerful engines from fast craft and presumed to be E-Boats. Magnesium flares were reported from similar directions. At no time during the action, even when E-Boats were sighted, did our radar show objects on a scope which could be identified as an E-Boat which would seem to indicate that the radar was not operating properly.'

As far as the German force was concerned, when the 9th Flotilla (*S-130*, *S-145* and *S-150*) spotted the red tracers they immediately assumed that as their unit had been ordered to change to yellow tracer, that the 5th Flotilla had done likewise. Therefore they identified the firing as coming from enemy ships which must have spotted the approaching S-Boats, instead of the fire from *S-140*. A concentrated torpedo attack by *S-150* and *S-130* was launched against a single ship while *S-145* broke off to engage what it thought were small armed escorts (possibly the lowered landing

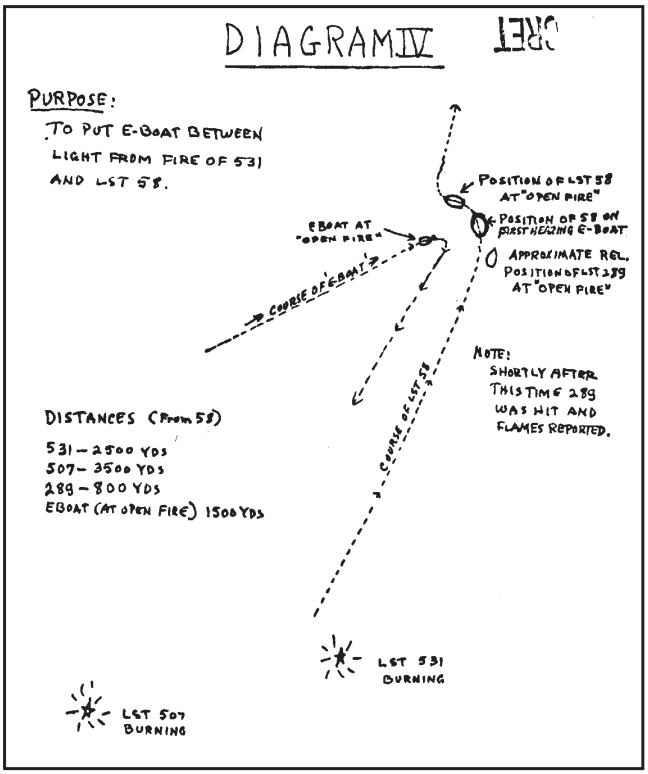
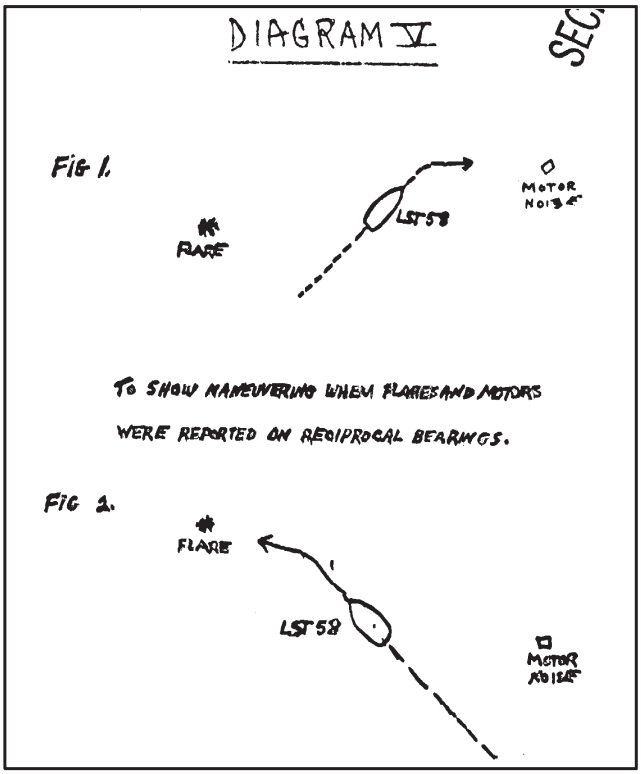
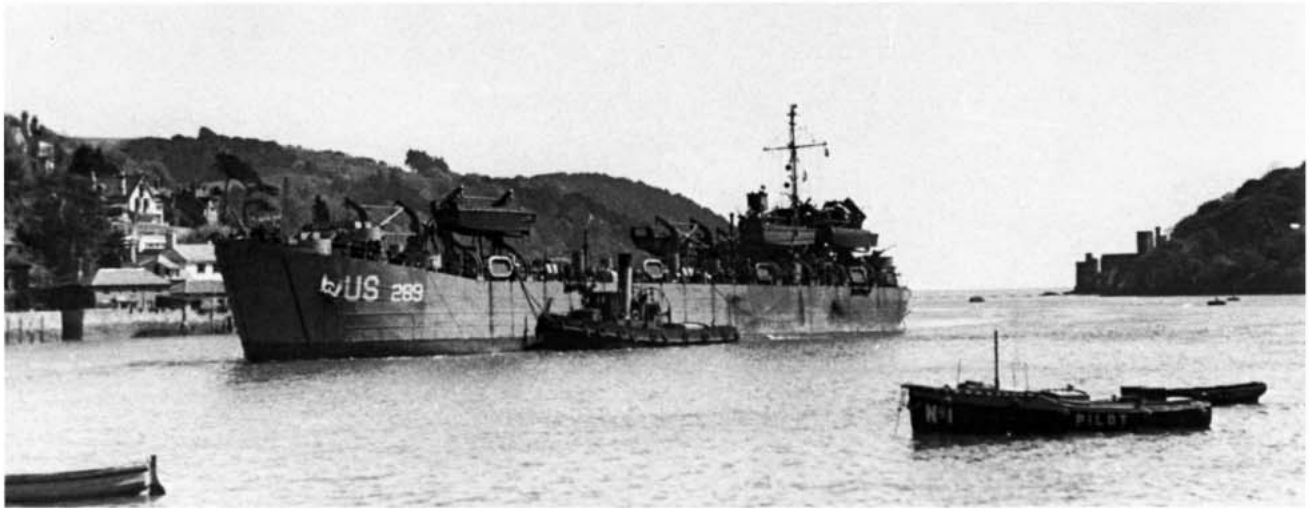


DIAGRAM IV
PURPOSE:
TO PUT E-BOAT BETWEEN LIGHT FROM FIRE OF 531 AND LST 58.
POSITION OF LST 58 AT "OPEN FIRE"
POSITION OF 58 ON FIRST HEARING E-BOAT
APPROXIMATE REL. POSITION OF LST 289 AT "OPEN FIRE"
EBOAT AT "OPEN FIRE"
COURSE OF E-BOAT
COURSE OF LST 58
NOTE: SHORTLY AFTER THIS TIME 289 WAS HIT AND FLAMES REPORTED.
DISTANCES (From 58)
531 – 2500 YDS
507 – 3500 YDS
289 – 800 YDS
EBOAT (AT OPEN FIRE) 1500 YDS
LST 531 BURNING
LST 507 BURNING






craft). Salvoes were fired and a hit scored on a 'steamer' after No. 2 torpedo had run 2 minutes 27 seconds. Two further torpedoes from *S-150* were also seen to score hits and *S-145* claimed another with a surface-running torpedo.

From the reports from the individual boats involved only a confusing picture emerges but Kapitänleutnant Freiherr von Mirbach reported that after subsequent evaluation of all the torpedo-firing documentation, he was awarding one 4,600-ton LST jointly to *S-150* and *S-130*, and another of 3,000 tons to *S-150*. Credit for sinking a 200-ton (*sic*) landing craft was given to *S-145*. In his summary the Flotilla Commander recorded that he considered the operation the best of all their sorties to date.

Inevitably, with all the confusion in the darkness, the after action reports submitted from the American LSTs were equally conflicting. Commander Skahill, LST Group 32, the convoy commander, tried to bring some order to the discrepancies by the production of the table reproduced here which he attached to his report submitted on May 3 to the Commander in Chief, US Fleet.

Two LSTs were sunk in the action and, in accordance with US Navy regulations (Article 841), it was the duty of the senior surviving officer to submit a report on the loss of the ship which, in the case of *LST 507* was completed by the Executive Officer, Lieutenant J. F. Murdock, USN. His report stated that 'at approximately 0135B [the suffix B denoting Baker time, i.e. British double summer time which had come into force on April 2] heard gunfire and observed tracers apparently coming from our port quarter. . . . Ship went to General Quarters. Source of firing could not be determined. Intermittent firing was

*Above:* **Having safely reached the River Dart, the crippled LST 289 is slowly eased up river past Baynards Cove on the morning of April 28. (National Archives)** *Below:* **Over three hundred years previously this exact spot had seen the approach of another stricken vessel when the leaking 60-ton Speedwell put in for repairs. The year was 1620 and she had left Southampton on August 15 in the company of the 180-ton Mayflower carrying the Pilgrim Fathers to the New World. From August 23 to 31 caulkers strove to make Speedwell watertight; then the two gallant ships set off again on their historic voyage to America but on September 16 Speedwell had to be abandoned, her passengers and crew being taken on board Mayflower. She arrived with her 102 'Old Comers' on December 21. (They were later known as the Forefathers, the term Pilgrim Fathers not coming into general use until 1820.)**

TIME OF EVENTS BY THESE LSTS

| EVENT | 515 | 496 | 511 | 531* | 58 | 499 | 289 | 507** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Flares seen | | | 0114 | | 2352<br>0020 | 2340<br>0020<br>0114 | 0020 | |
| Felt underwater jar | | | | | | 0120-<br>0123<br>0128 | 0104 | |
| Saw gunfire astern | 0135 | 0135 | 0135 | | 0133 | 0138 | 0130 | |
| Evaded Torpedo | | | | | | 0203 | 0219 | |
| Observed first torpedoed and burning ship | 0204 | 0215 | 0205 | | 0202 | 0203 | 0203 | |
| Observed 2nd torpedoed and burning ship | *** 0208 | 0221 | 0221 | | 0217 | 0220 | 0219 | |
| LSTs opened initial fire | **** 0220 | 0221 | 0222 | fired after being hit. | 0225 | did not fire | 0228 | did not fire |
| Radioed Attack | 0232 | | | | | 0225 | | |

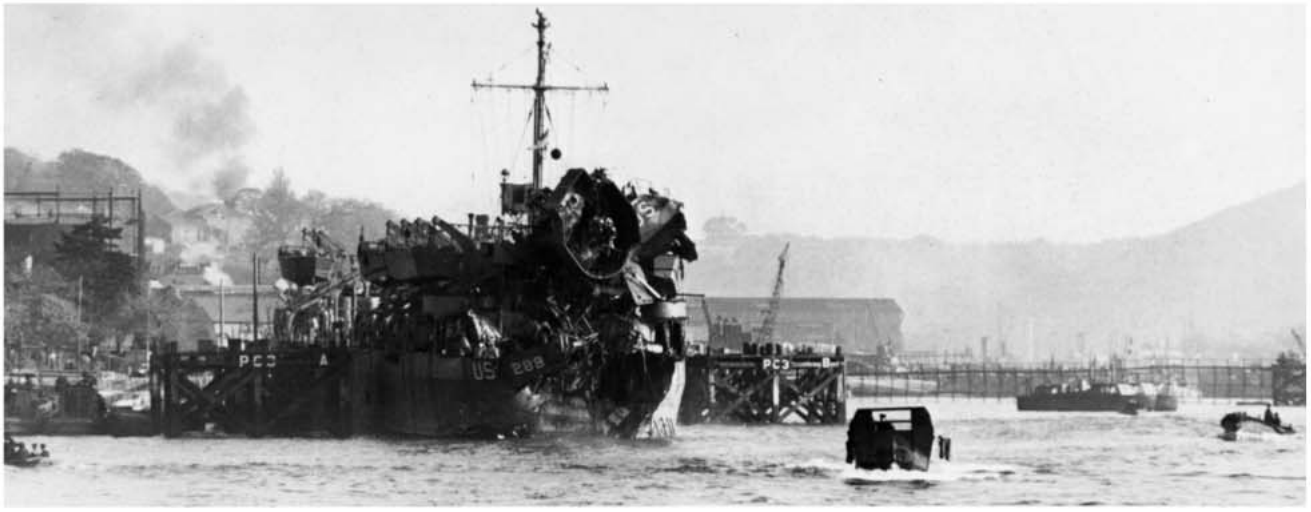
| EVENT | 515 | 496 | 511 | 531* | 58 | 499 | 289 | 507** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Observed 3rd torpedoed and burning ship | | 0221 | | | 0230 | | | |
| Heard E boats | | | | | 0217<br>0224<br>0302<br>0225 | | | |
| Saw E boats | | 0228 | | | 0302 | | | |
| E boats crossed Bow | | 0225 | Between 0222 & 0224 | | | | | |
| Saw Periscope | | | 0500 | | | | | |

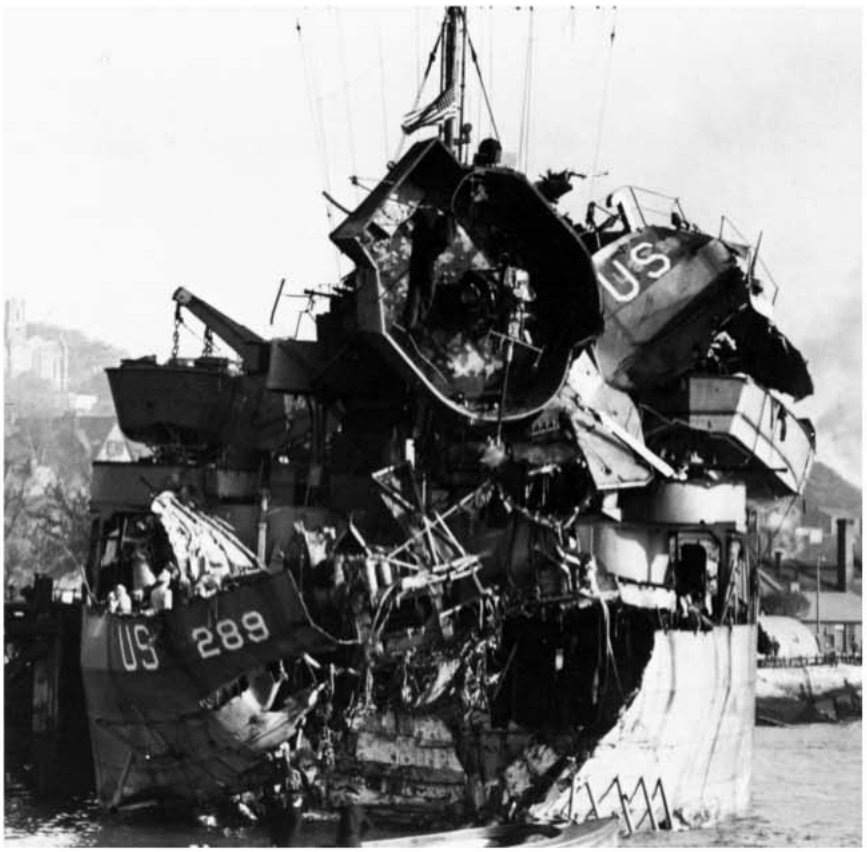
ALL TIMES BAKER.
* No records available
** No records available
*** This should be 0218
**** This should be 0218

Times of events:- The times of specific events given by the various ships varies up to 13 minutes.

LSTOr32/L11-1/P6-1
Serial: 001
S-E-C-R-E-T

3 May 1944





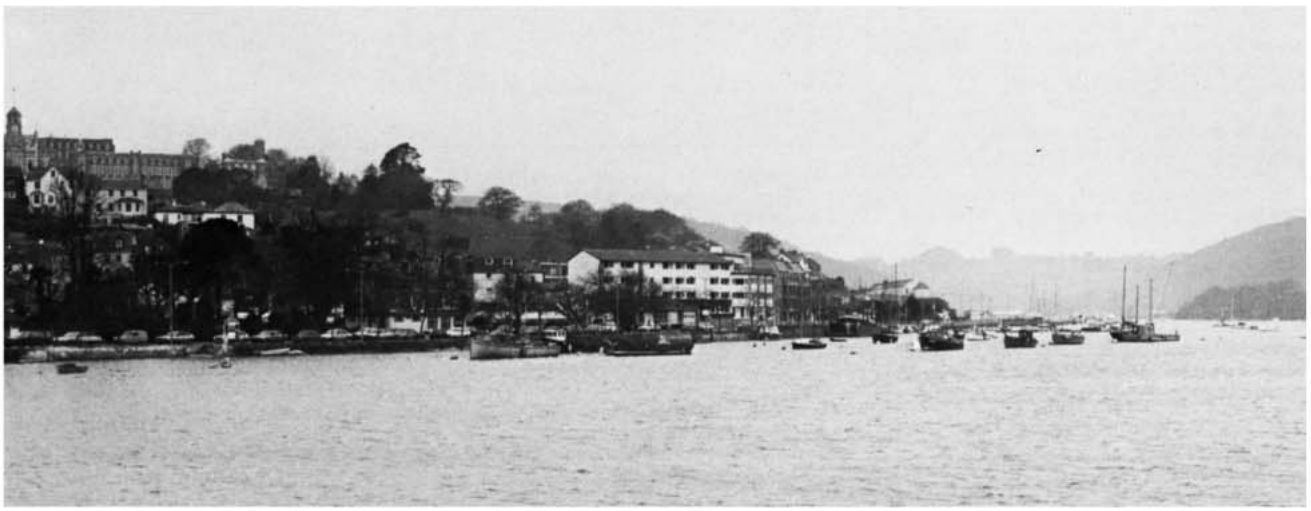

*Above:* **She was brought to Dartmouth where extra jetties had been built to accommodate the massive increase in shipping.** *Right:* **The port is renowned as the home of the Britannia Royal Naval College — its chapel can be seen on the left of the photo. (National Archives)**

heard between the time of the first firing and about 0204B when this ship was torpedoed on the starboard side. Torpedo struck auxiliary engine room and all electric power failed. The main engines stopped. The ship burst into flames. Fire fighting was attempted but the vast percentage of the equipment was either inoperative, due to power failure, or, inaccessible due to fire. What fire fighting equipment was available was used, but it was inadequate. Fire gained headway.'

Lieutenant Murdock continued: 'I turned over the key of the ship's office to the ship's yeoman to enable the yeoman to save the ship's records. The ship quartermaster's note book was in the possession of the leading quartermaster just before abandoning ship. The Division Disbursing Officer was attached to *LST 507*, and one of the storekeepers took the records over the side with him. The yeoman and senior quartermaster were not rescued and the records they carried have not been recovered; the records carried by the storekeeper were lost at sea.

'Between 0240B and 0245B the originator of this report abandoned ship with the then Commanding Officer, Lieutenant J. S. Swarts, USNR. It is estimated that the order

*Below:* **Today all the wartime docking facilities have been dismantled and the gasworks on the left demolished.**



**Casualties are brought ashore to waiting ambulances parked on North Embankment. All this catwalk and timber staging was removed after the war but the precise location where LST 289 docked at Dartmouth can be established by the inclusion of the tip of the passenger ferry building on the extreme right. (National Archives)**

to abandon ship was ten minutes prior to this. As far as could be observed the abandoning of the ship was orderly. Opportunity was afforded only to launch Nos. 1 and 2 boats and at least two life rafts. About 0442B the *LST 515* arrived, lowered boats and engaged in picking up survivors. The originator was on a raft which went alongside the *LST 515* and he was hoisted aboard.'

When it came to assess the casualties (*see table*) on *LST 507*, an accurate count of the army personnel aboard could not be determined. The figure of 282 was given to Lieutenant Murdock by Captain Seibert, the senior army officer aboard and one of the missing. A check of a water-soaked and much pen-deleted army roster carried overboard by Lieutenant Murdock listed 294 army personnel on board. However he believed that Captain Siebert's figure of 282 was the correct one as the latter advised that he had left a list of the army personnel with the Hard Master at Brixham.

Ensign Douglas E. Harlander was the most senior survivor on *LST 531*: 'Approximately 0204B a ship was reported afire in the distance off our starboard quarter. Ensign Cantrell and myself observed the fire and we were puzzled as to its identity. About the time we decided it was an LST (approximately 0218B), this ship was torpedoed on the starboard side by two torpodeos separated by about one minute of time. First torpedo hit amidships, the second torpedo hit in the vicinity of No. 3 boat. The ship immediately burst into flames and a 40mm gun immediately commenced firing to starboard. All electric power failed, telephones were inoperative, and the engines stopped. Fire fighting was attempted but was futile, the apparatus used failed to function. It was apparent the fire could not be controlled and efforts were made to release No. 4 boat, these efforts were not successful due to the flames — boats Nos. 5 and 6 were demolished by the explosions. At approximately 0224B, the ship rolled over and I gave the command to abandon ship but I estimate that not more than 15 men were in the vicinity. Some men had previously jumped overboard. At approximately 0700B I was rescued by HMS *Onslow*.'

*LST 289*, carrying 395 army personnel, 22 DUKWs, one 2½-ton truck and a jeep, had taken a torpedo hit on the stern. At the beginning of the action, the six LCVPs carried were lowered away but one, No. C23569, was hit and had to be abandoned. The other five, nestling against their wounded mother ship, helped keep her on course for Dartmouth. A signal was received ordering the ship to proceed to Brixham instead but Lieutenant Harry Mettler protested that medical facilities there were not adequate, and he was given leave to continue his course for Dartmouth.

*LST 496* had opened up a crossfire but unfortunately, instead of hitting the German S-Boats, numerous men were wounded on the decks of *LST 511*, 600 yards away. The latter turned about and made her way to Portland where she arrived at 6.30 a.m. sending the wounded to the British naval hospital.

*LST 515* lowered boats to rescue survivors and picked up 118 walking wounded, 14 stretcher cases and 45 bodies, whereupon she proceeded to Portland where the wounded were transferred to hospital.

In total 639 men had been killed or were missing. Most other accounts give 638 but they omit one of the wounded, S2c Earl V Muza, who died in hospital from his injuries. As a practice operation for the Utah landings, the total is probably more than ten times the actual American casualties sustained during the real thing on June 6. (Some sources quote 43 Americans killed and 63 wounded in the Utah sector on D-Day, and in fact the 4th Infantry Division only had 844 men killed in the entire period from June 6 to July 1.)

Naturally a full enquiry was demanded, and the precise areas of responsibility of the various naval commanders involved was examined. American concern was voiced to Rear Admiral Leatham over the lack of escorts, in particular the absence of the *Scimitar*, and the failure to provide a replacement. In his reply to Rear Admiral John Hall on May 5, the British admiral apologised and offered his profound regrets.

**REPORTED CASUALTIES**

| | *NAVY* | | *ARMY* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **LST 507** (Sunk) | | | | |
| Originally aboard | 165 | | 282 | |
| Rescued | 94 | (5 of these hospital cases) | 151 | (19 of these hospital cases) |
| Killed | 47 | | | |
| Missing | 24 | | 131 | (Dead & Missing) |
| **LST 531** (Sunk) | | | | |
| Originally aboard | 142 | | 354 | |
| Rescued | 28 | (15 of these hospital cases) | 44 | (10 of these hospital cases) |
| Killed & Missing | 114 | | 310 | |
| **LST 289** (Damaged) | | | | |
| Originally aboard | Not stated | | 395 | |
| Wounded | 17 | | 4 | |
| Killed | 5 | | | |
| Missing | 8 | | | |
| **LST 511** (Hit by fire from LST 496) | | | | |
| Wounded | 14 | | 4 | |

**The majority of the casualties were on LST 531 built by the Missouri Valley Bridge & Iron Company between September 22 and November 24, 1943. Early in 1984 a report was included in one of the more sensational of Britain's daily newspapers to the effect that a landlady in the area claimed to have seen, while delivering bread to a US camp, the burial of the Americans killed in an unmarked mass grave near the town. Without checking on the accuracy of the information the story was run on February 14 to be quickly taken up on radio. Several readers contacted us to see if we could substantiate the tale. Having already obtained the full wartime reports on the E-Boat incident, we sent a list of the names of known casualties to the US Adjutant General to request their current place of burial. Readers will recall that the American authorities permitted the repatriation of remains to the States after the war: thus only forty per cent of dead formerly buried in the UK remain in Cambridge. Thus on our check list of a dozen names, four were still at Cambridge, one was missing and recorded as such, the others all being accounted for in cemeteries in America. (S2c Earl V. Muza, the casualty usually omitted from the official total because he died later of his injuries is buried in Riverside Cemetery, Oshkosh, Wisconsin.)**

In his view there were strong contributory causes:

(i) the fact that concurrently with the execution of Exercise TIGER many urgent movements, planning and preparations were in progress for Exercise FABIUS following closely on its heels.
(ii) that a night action with enemy destroyers was fought on 25/26 and plans were being made for another offensive operation on 28th April, thus with other current operations, the capacity of the staff was severely stretched.
(iii) the immense recent increase in communications arising largely out of causes (i) and (ii) above, which caused abnormal delays in the distribution of signals.
(iv) the late distribution of the exercise orders and incompleteness of some of the sets supplied which gave very little time for their study and digestion by the many officers concerned.

Even as the Admiral was writing these words, Operation Fabius was already under way. Designed as the big final exercise to test all the facets of the invasion plan, it was divided into five separate phases spread over May 2-6. Because of the geographical deployment of the troops in the United Kingdom (with the American forces mainly to the west of the country), these practice beaches along the southern coast of England were laid out in reverse order to the actual ones on the French coast (see map on page 1).

Fabius I, again held at the Slapton Assault

**The original caption on this picture is ambigious as it purports to have been taken on June 6, 1944. However the original negative was received by the Signal Corps headquarters in May and it would appear that June 6 was the release date of the photograph. Having been taken just opposite New Strete Lodge between Blackpool and Slapton, most probably it shows the massing of invasion craft of Force O for Operation Fabius, the last full-scale exercise held May 2-6.**

**. . . and these are the good guys! Waterborne MPs described as 'armed and rigorously trained' ready for trouble as Force O moves towards the beach. (US Army)**

**The freshwater Ley provided an ideal spot for a ponton bridge. (US Army) Today this whole area is a nature reserve.**

**Well it was like this Sir . . . Grim faced Generals Collins and Bradley listen to a field officer's explanations on the beachhead after Operation Tiger. (Signal Corps)**

Training Area, was this time for Assault Force O — the US 1st Infantry Division landing at Omaha.

Fabius II was for Assault Force G in which the British 50th Northumbrian Division, due to land on Gold Beach, came ashore on Hayling Island, just south of Havant in Hampshire.

Fabius III consisted of Assault Force J (for Juno) whereby the Canadian 3rd Infantry Division practised their landing just to the east at Bracklesham Bay.

Fabius IV tested the British 3rd Infantry Division — Assault Force S — whose simulated Sword landings took place ten miles further east at Littlehampton.

Fabius V and VI were held for the familiarisation of the Neptune personnel involved in the build-up forces sailing from the Thames and east coast ports.

Numerous other exercises, before and after, tested signals, Channel trunk circuits, Pluto, the evacuation of wounded by landing craft (aptly named Operation Splint) and so on.

That the invasion was a success hardly needs repeating; that its success was reinforced by the many training exercises carried out beforehand is undoubted; that the men that died during those training exercises helped ensure the final victory is also certain. The lessons learned in the disaster at Slapton were not forgotten and their deaths were not in vain.

*Lieutenant General Omar Bradley, US First Army Commander, had been an observer on April 28 to the Tiger operation together with the Supreme Commander and his deputy, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder, and Brigadier General Leonard Gerow of V Corps (Omaha beach), all in LC 495. Although he was informed by Major General Collins that there had been a German naval attack during the night, Bradley claims that the full extent of the disaster was not made known to him. In fact he records in his memoirs that it was not until four years after the war had ended that he learned the full extent of the tragedy and only then did he realise that the report had been withheld from him. However Eisenhower's Naval Aide, Commander Harry C. Butcher, says that he was present when Ike was informed by telephone by 'Beetle' — the American Chief of Staff Major General W. Bedell Smith — on the evening of April 28 that losses were believed to be 300 to 400. The Combined Chiefs of Staff were informed immediately and it is difficult to see how the matter was never raised, even in casual conversation, with the commander of the army concerned in the incident.*

*The Tiger exercise itself was a disaster. Compounded by the postponement of H-Hour being observed by only some of the forces concerned, the air support had failed to materialise and the beach engineer organisation had broken down.*

*Bradley simply claims that the engineer troubles ashore were caused by the loss of the LCTs at sea — but surely this is not true as the first landings, as has been described above, had taken place over sixteen hours before the attack. Nevertheless Eisenhower reported that the loss of three tank landing ships had reduced the reserve of LSTs for Overlord to nothing. (The top brass were also gunning for the person who delayed H-Hour without informing them!)*

*Worse than all this was the fact that ten 'Bigot' officers were reported to be among the missing from the LCTs. Although they would not have known the precise date for D-Day — even Eisenhower would have got that wrong had he been asked on April 28 — they would have been aware of the location of the landing beaches in France and numerous other details which could spell disaster to the invasion. If the Germans had fished any Bigots out of the water and taken them prisoner there could be no guarantee they would not be made to talk. Although the inevitable Admiralty enquiry indicated that the E-Boats, having come under fire from the LSTs, would have had no time to rescue anybody in the water, General Montgomery, the overall Allied Land Force Commander whose men would suffer the consequences of any breach of secrecy, was not satisfied. He immediately sent an American staff officer, Ralph Ingersoll, down to Dartmouth where the damaged LST 289 was moored and there he interviewed two of the army officers who had been aboard when she was torpedoed. Their story fully justified Montgomery's concern as they revealed there had been no naval escort and that after the two LSTs had gone down, the German craft*

**The Bigot system, introduced to safeguard the secrets of D-Day, was to ensure that only those who needed to know were allowed access to the most secret of all secret documents concerning the location of the actual landings in France. Each item bore a number as in the illustration and its distribution was to Bigots only.**

**These map cases were prepared by Brigadier 'Archie' Clough, Eisenhower's Head of Survey in the Royal Engineers, for each senior commander — Bradley's now in the After the Battle collection. The Bigot system was not foolproof as there is an interesting case recorded of a 'bigoted' officer working at the 576th Army Postal Unit at Sutton Coldfield near Birmingham who was convicted of disclosing the objectives of the US First Army to a member of the Adjutant General's department on May 23, 1944. Sentence: dismissed the service and confinement with hard labour for one year at the US Disciplinary Barracks at Greenhaven, New York.**

*had come within a hundred yards and turned on their searchlights. In their glare, men could be seen bobbing in the water and as the sea was calm the collecting of survivors would have been easy.*

*When the report reached the ears of General Thomas Batts who was in charge of the Bigots he realised that the threat of exposure, if it was a threat at all, had to be either confirmed or eliminated. A vast fishing expedition was therefore set in motion in Lyme Bay although in this case the catch was to be corpses . . . and the more the better. Although the searchers realised they could scarcely hope to recover all those missing, all they were concerned in finding were the ten Bigots. As Ralph Ingersoll wrote after the war: 'By one of those amazing miracles which characterise war, although the bodies of hundreds who went down were never recovered, the remains of every single one of the Bigoted officers were found. Each was recovered, its corpse floated by its Mae West, and properly identified.'*

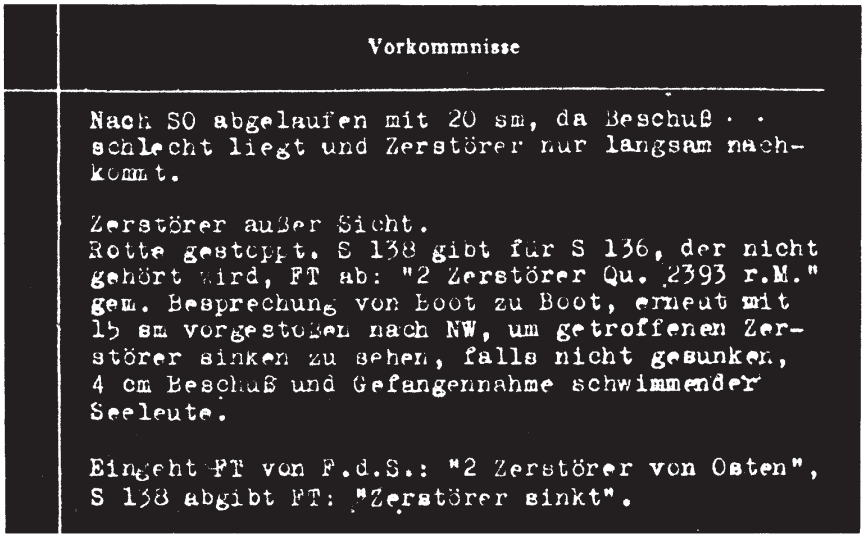
*To the outside world the disaster of Tiger remained a closely-guarded secret. Even within the services no information or communique was issued and the staff of the 228th Station Hospital at Sherbourne, Dorset, which received hundreds of immersion and explosive casualties, were simply told to ask no questions and that they would be subject to court-martial if they discussed the tragedy. While the information was available to the dedicated military researcher as early as 1946, the full extent of the incident was not brought home to the general public until General A. M. Gruenther, the American NATO commander, gave the details in a speech delivered at Slapton on the tenth anniversary of D-Day.*

*It was only natural that the advent of another anniversary — the fortieth — should awaken interest on both sides of the Channel to the momentous events of June 6, 1944. While the main spotlight focuses on Normandy, the people of Slapton will be holding their own ceremony. An American warship is hoped for and moves are already well advanced to raise a Sherman DD from offshore. The local media has been alerted and already Frank Wintle of Television South West has investigated the affair in his documentary 'Sands of Silence'. Ralph C. Greene, American author of 'Medical Overkill' and one of those told to remain silent at the 228th Hospital, has spent years tracing both American, British and German survivors of the action and has been invited to England by the TV station.*

*And what of the Slapton Assault Training Area itself today, now long reinstated and returned to agriculture with little to mark its unique role in WWII. Grace Bradbeer gave a graphic description of what the area was like after the troops departed in her delightful history of the South Hams area 'The Land had Changed its Face':*

*'Almost total silence now descended upon the area, in complete contrast to the violent and abrupt noises of the past six months. No movement, no cattle, no sign of life in the farms and villages, not even birds with cheerful songs were there bringing in the dawn, to break this curious feeling of emptiness; though actually a little human life was soon drafted in to assess the state of the land, and to make immediate plans to get things restored as soon as possible. Also US sentries were still on guard to keep out everyone who did not have a permit to enter, for there was an unknown quantity of unexploded ammunition about. . . .*

*'By and large, however, the area seemed to lie as if under a spell, beautiful still but neglected and forlorn, waiting for the touch of a magic wand to revive its normal life. But nature is never still, especially in the summer, and gradually the flowers and ferns helped to hide the ravages of war. Brambles covered the*



Vorkommnisse

Nach SO abgelaufen mit 20 sm, da Beschuß · · schlecht liegt und Zerstörer nur langsam nachkommt.

Zerstörer außer Sicht.
Rotte gestoppt. S 138 gibt für S 136, der nicht gehört wird, FT ab: "2 Zerstörer Qu. 2393 r.M." gem. Besprechung von Boot zu Boot, erneut mit 15 sm vorgestoßen nach NW, um getroffenen Zerstörer sinken zu sehen, falls nicht gesunken, 4 cm Beschuß und Gefangennahme schwimmender Seeleute.

Eingeht FT von F.d.S.: "2 Zerstörer von Osten", S 138 abgibt FT: "Zerstörer sinkt".

**The Allied Command would have been deeply worried had they known the truth and General Montgomery would most probably have demanded that D-Day be cancelled altogether. All previous accounts of the sinkings have never mentioned prisoners being taken by the S-Boats. However the German naval log reveals all. The operative words: 'Gefangennahme schwimmender Seeleute' — swimming sailors captured.**

Recommendations.

(a) Larger escort force, if available.

(b) Insure that vital information on enemy contacts is disseminated quickly.

(c) That a standard procedure and a special circuit be established in each Operation for reporting emergencies of a tactical nature; also that collective radio calls be assigned for each group of ships acting as a unit.

(d) All hands should again be cautioned not to look too long at flares or fires, as it cuts down on ability to see objects in the dark.

(e) For short operating periods, carry only sufficient fuel for the operation. This will cut down on burnable material. Un-used fuel oil tanks could be filled with water.

(f) Rifles and pistols should be made generally available to fire at E boats when they pass close aboard, especially when guns cannot depress sufficiently.

(g) A high frequency voice circuit used at low power will materially aid operators of isolated units.

(h) Life rafts and life boats - where possible they should be made as near ready for lowering as gunfire requirements and structural limitations permit.

(i) Illumination rockets - a type of rocket suitable for use by slow moving and large ships like LSTs is recommended for illuminating craft such as "E" boats.

(j) Fire Fighting - that a more adequate means of drawing water to fight fires - and dependent entirely on manual operation - be provided for LSTs and other ships carrying highly inflammable cargo.

(k) Life preservers - fro the number of dead bodies observed in the water, it is believed that the kapok jacket is more effective for holding up the head of exhausted swimmers than the CO2 inflated single belt type.

(l) Heavy shoes - survivors who were questioned stated that heavy shoes were a burden while a man is attempting to remain afloat. It is recommended that where atandoning ship is a possibility personnel wearing heavy shoes be indoctrinated to lossen shoe laces so that shoes may be quickly removed if necessary.

**The lessons learned. Few could argue that the lives lost on April 28 did not materially assist the landings in June. The recommendations were quickly acted upon.**

**1944-1984. It could easily be a corner of the Normandy battlefield; in fact it is Strete at the northern end of the beach. The beautifully reconstructed Manor house was photographed by kind permission of the current owner, Mr Starling Lark.**

*broken hedges, honeysuckle grew over the thistles, docks and much other vegetation struggled for space with wild hops, ivy and meadowsweet, but the great gashes made by the shells, the leafless trees, the broken banks — those were not able to be covered up in a hurry.*

*'Shell holes were plentiful in fields, roads, even gardens, especially in those near the coast. The South Hams is blessed with many beautiful trees and these suffered badly in many cases. They stood lifting leafless branches up to the sky but it was soon discovered that many others, though not actually killed, had lost their shape and design and even today a few of these can quite easily be picked out from those which were more or less untouched. The long, winding road leading uphill from Slapton Sands to the village of Strete is bounded on each side by old stone walls which were hit in so many places that a child, on her return, told her mother that it looked as if a giant had taken big bites out of them!'*

*'However, when the last American truck had departed from the area with all the equipment not needed for D-Day, the ground was formally handed back to the Government. Rehabilitation of the land was in the hands of the War Agricultural Executive Committee, and the task of restoration started. First of all a bomb disposal unit was sent in with mine detectors to seek out unexploded ammunition, and set to work in three stages: the outer perimeter first, then the centre, leaving the coastline, obviously the worst hit, until the last. The main object at first was to get back as many farmers as possible in time to make sure that at least a little autumn sowing could be done. Some farms naturally had been more hit about than others and the longer it took to repair the farmhouse the worse was the neglect on the land.*

*'A great deal also depended upon restoration of the roads. For farming could not really begin to get under way until the roads were repaired, especially in central and coastal places; they had to be safe for farm equipment, cattle and supplies. The rural council men were sent in to repair the more important ones as soon as possible as enormous craters had to be filled in and then the damaged walls repaired; fences which had been literally torn to pieces by the passing of huge war equipment had to be sorted out to render the lanes passable. In some parts the little lanes had proved too narrow for some of the huge American vehicles so the troops had either flattened the hedges and banks or, more commonly, had filled the lanes with great loads of earth which raised their level to the bank tops. These alterations were not extensive but gave rise to great astonishment when the people returned. When vans were able to use the roads, main drainage, water, electricity and the telephone were restored by the appropriate companies. These modern amenities were by no means universal, especially in the more remote districts but, little by little, they gradually came to most places to the delight and comfort of the local inhabitants.*

*'As soon as the mine detectors had been over the outer perimeter they moved systematically through the centre down towards the coast. Following them came the surveyors and photographers with their previous records to assess the damage. Theirs was a long assignment and in some cases they were still at work two years afterwards. At the same time an absolute army of workers was drafted in — road repairers, engineers and builders, also those groups who had helped to move out the farmers, reinforced again by prisoners from Exeter jail (a welcome change for them) and Italian prisoners of war, who occupied a rough camp left by the troops. . . .*

*'One of the first casualties in the early days of the war was Strete Manor (which had been*

*used as an hotel), a big house at the base of the long winding hill leading up to the village of Strete. Although blamed on the occupying US troops, actually it had been burnt down before the occupation. However, the stables and cottage on the opposite side of the land were severely damaged by shellfire but have since been turned into a very charming dwelling house. . . .*

*'Torcross at the other end of Slapton Sands had remarkably little damage as far as the exercises went and, considering how near it is to the sea, great care must have been taken to avoid the village. . . .*

*'The outer perimeter of the area on the hilltops had experienced the least destruction, being furthest from the coast. Not every house was damaged and some could be lived in again almost immediately. In some cases, however, where there had been heavy shelling, it was actually some years before reoccupation took place. . . . For instance, there were signs that the village of Blackawton had been involved in one of the exercises for, although it was high up on the hill, it had been knocked about to the extent of several houses being roofless, or partly so, and there was hardly a pane of glass anywhere. The vicarage was no exception: every window broken, no doors left standing, the whole house wide open and in a fearful state of dirt and disorder.*

*'Although the entire area had been combed for unexploded ammunition before anyone had official permission to enter, the occasional shell or mine was still being turned up months after D-Day. Where the ground was still marshy, for instance, something was occasionally missed by the minesweepers, and although no lives were reported lost due to such a happening, there were many panic-stricken moments when an explosion was heard in or near the field where a farmer was known to be ploughing; sheep were usually the only casualties. . . .'*

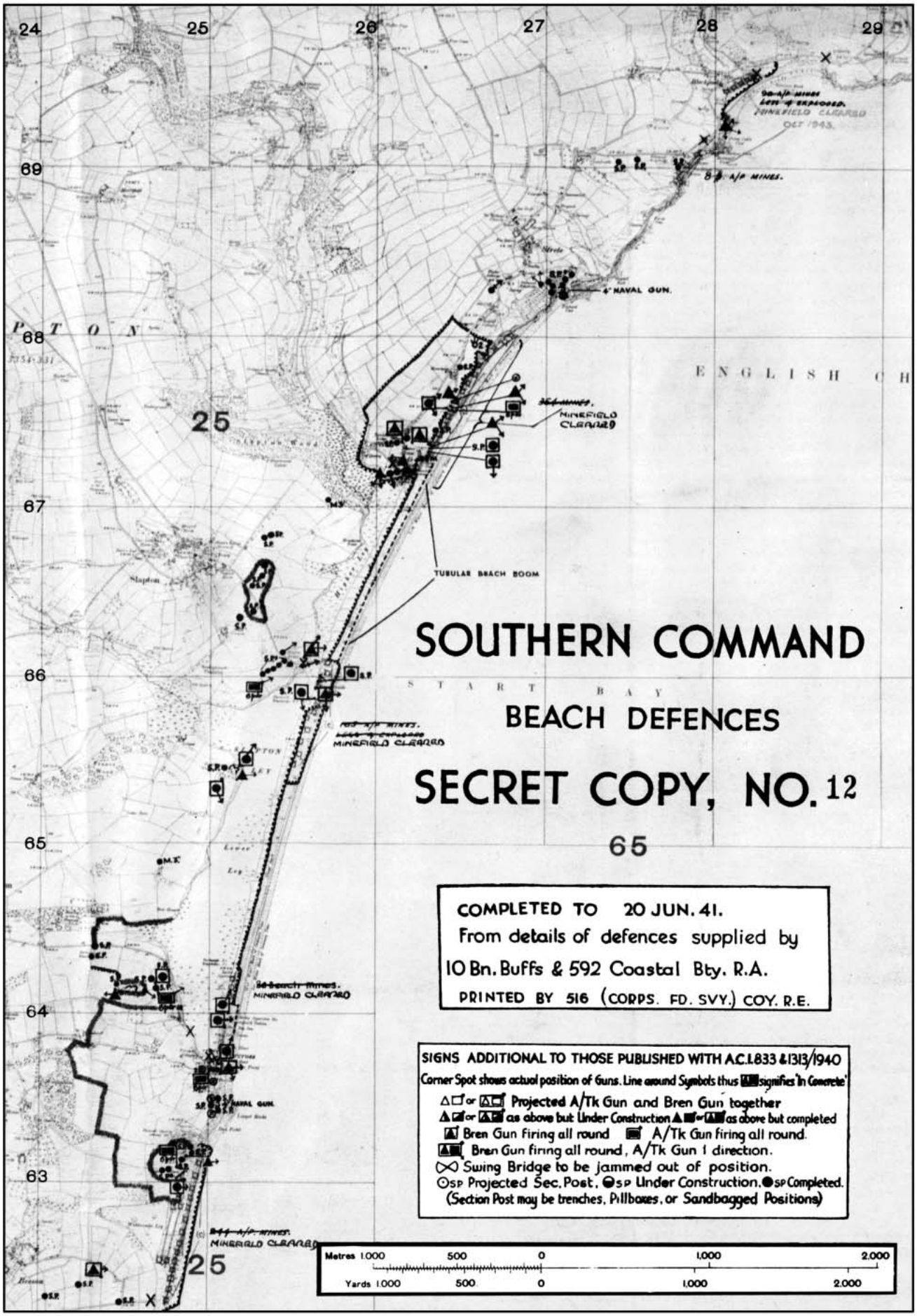
*Of necessity war breeds expediency but the location of a battle training area in a residential and agricultural community was bound to store up these problems of explosive ordnance clearance once the area was returned to its former owners. The problem had already surfaced in 1943 when the decision was taken to carry out training at Slapton, as the shoreline was already protected with Beach Type C mines sown in 1940. Minefield No. 54 had been laid in fourteen sections from map reference 257658 to 257659 (a Modified British System grid reference not compatable with the National Grid). This field had been swept and some of the mines lifted by US engineers prior to the commencement of training but it must be remembered that the mine detectors of the period were really only satisfactory down to a depth of 18 inches. Where a shingle foreshore is involved, with levels shifting all the time, the method is most unreliable.*

*When after D-Day the Slapton Assault Training Area ceased to be used, a meeting was held in London on June 30 at which the US Army stated that it hoped to complete clearance of all ordnance introduced in the area during the training period by the end of August 1944. Normally a clearance certificate is issued when an area has been cleared, different classifications being given to each according to how successful the operation has been. Thus a Type II certificate confirms that the number of mines removed plus any craters equals the number laid. Type IIA indicates that not all mines laid have been accounted for, and so on. However one of the usual certificates was not issued after the American clear up operation although HQ Southern Command informed the Regional Commissioner of No. 7 Region by letter in May 1945 that the beaches had been cleared. Subsequently a formal certificate was issued on July 30, 1945.*

*However ordnance of all types continued to*

**Such was the price paid by the people of South Hams — the Stretegate Manor Hotel — demolished and never rebuilt.**

**To the observant visitor, vestiges of war can still be discerned. *Left:* Repaired shell-damage to a home in Slapton and *right* the scaffolding anchor post for the pontoon bridge on page 23.**


SOUTHERN COMMAND
BEACH DEFENCES
SECRET COPY, NO. 12
65
COMPLETED TO 20 JUN. 41.
From details of defences supplied by
10 Bn. Buffs & 592 Coastal Bty. R.A.
PRINTED BY 516 (CORPS. FD. SVY.) COY. R.E.
SIGNS ADDITIONAL TO THOSE PUBLISHED WITH A.C.I.833 & 1313/1940
Corner Spot shows actual position of Guns. Line around Symbols thus signifies 'In Concrete'
Projected A/Tk Gun and Bren Gun together
as above but Under Construction
as above but completed
Bren Gun firing all round
A/Tk Gun firing all round.
Bren Gun firing all round, A/Tk Gun 1 direction.
Swing Bridge to be jammed out of position.
SP Projected Sec. Post, SP Under Construction, SP Completed.
(Section Post may be trenches, Pillboxes, or Sandbagged Positions)
Metres 1,000 500 0 1,000 2,000
Yards 1,000 500 0 1,000 2,000
TUBULAR BEACH BOOM
4" NAVAL GUN
MINEFIELD CLEARED
ENGLISH CH
24
25
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69

This map shows the original British beach defences including minefields installed at Slapton. (33 Engineer Regiment, EOD)

*come to light in the area and early in 1950 five American anti-tank mines were found although unfused and buried upside down. Then in May that year the Home Office in Bristol received a report that a further four anti-tank mines had been found at MR188/828441. Major D. J. O'Shaughnessy immediately visited the area and found several pieces of British B Type C mines just by carrying out a visual search. An immediate order was given for a resweep of an area 500 yards by 30 yards during which a further 128 anti-tank Mk V mines were found, eight AP grenades and one 36 Mills grenade, one Bazooka and one PIAT round, an 80mm 25lb shell and a British 5-inch rocket. On May 22 it was reported that the beach minefield had been cleared and that Blackpool beach — Green Beach of the landing operations — had also been swept again.*

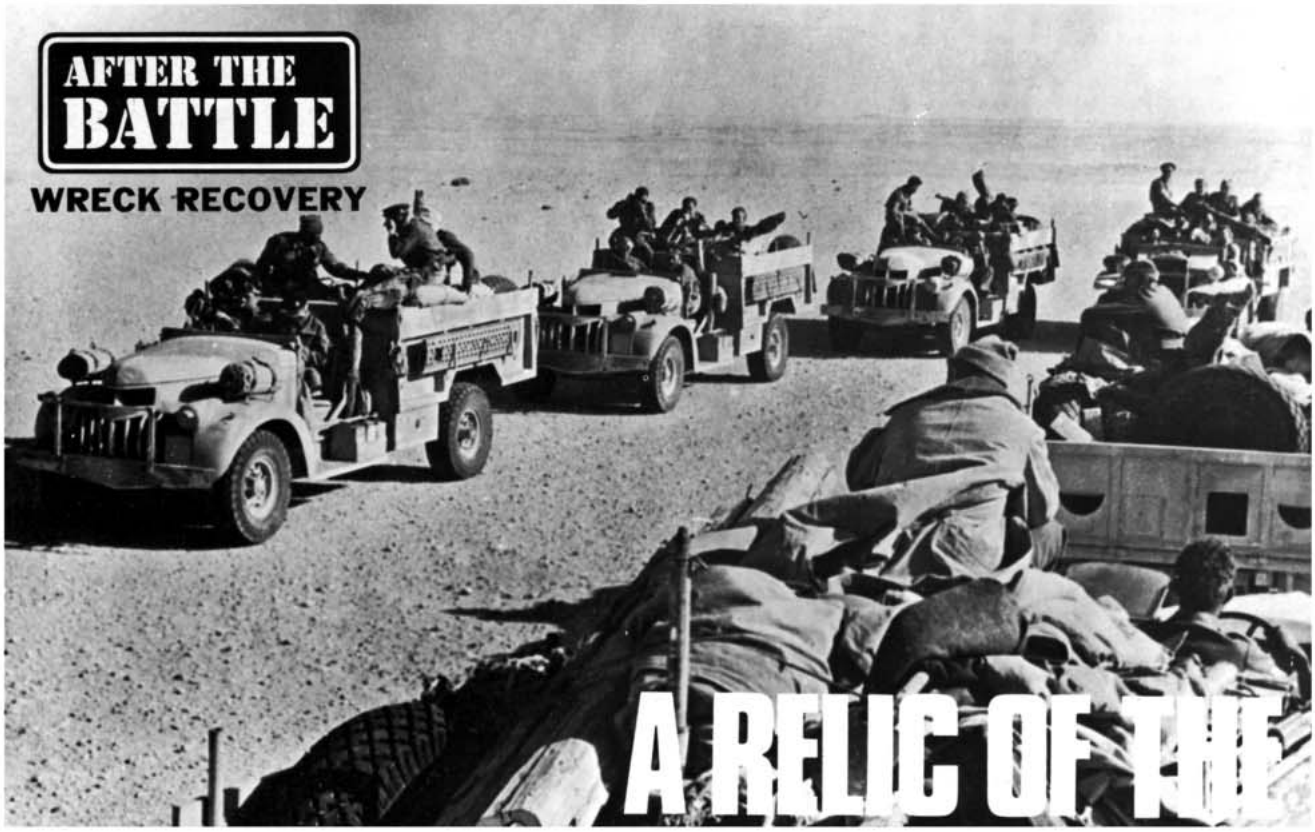
*Thereafter official records state that all was quiet until 1956 when the sea uncovered more mines. The beach was inspected again, this time by Captain W. P. C. Dawton on September 7, and he reported explosives uncovered all over the area. He also noted that as several American mines were discovered in the rushes on the edge of Slapton Ley — the lake behind the beach — it was assumed that US engineers had disposed of at least some of the mines found by just dumping them in the water. Since then further mines have surfaced, one even being dug up by a contractor digging a cesspit at Strete Manor in April 1960.*

*As the only classification that could be given to the clearance certificate was IIA (see above), no guarantee could be given that more mines would not be found. Pressure from the local council in 1980 resulted in another assessment of the problem in August that year. Although the technology was now at hand (through the £6000 Forster Locator) to detect down to 18 feet, the large amount of shrapnel, remains of PSP matting and other debris still embedded in the ground made their use impractical. The only sure way was to bring in an armoured bulldozer to remove the shingle in stages down to a depth of two metres. Even then there could be no cast iron guarantee that the sea would not wash up more mines at a later date.*

*To the casual visitor to the South Hams area today there are few signs of damage to be seen, all the dead and broken trees having been felled with only an occasional distorted one left to tell the tale. More poignant though is the American monument although this is a memorial with a difference . . . a memorial to the living. Dedicated on July 24, 1954, as its inscription proclaims, it was 'presented by the United States Army Authorities to the people of the South Hams who generously left their homes and their lands to provide a battle practice area for the successful assault in Normandy in June 1944.'*

**A major after the battle recovery in the making. Ken Small with a propellor from a DD Sherman which lies three-quarters of a mile offshore. He has purchased the 'wreck' from the US government and plans to raise it by D-Day 1984.**

*Left:* **A proud day indeed. Sir John Daw, chairman of Devon County Council, who had had the difficult task of explaining to the people why they must leave their homes in 1943, sees a grateful ally dedicate a memorial to their generosity. With him is Lieutenant General John C. H. Lee, Commanding General of the Communications Zone, European Theater of Operations. Unfortunately the village of Sherford was omitted from the inscription. (US Army)** *Right:* **Sadly those of another age are not so grateful or well informed about its purpose as this is not a war memorial as such. Shortly before our second visit to Slapton in March 1984 Jane Mitchelmore photographed the obelisk daubed with red paint by the 'Men for Peace'.**




# LONG RANGE DESERT GROUP

BY JIM PATCH,
Honorary Secretary LRDG Association

In the course of its operations in the deserts of Egypt, Libya and Tunisia during the early 1940s, the Long Range Desert Group (LRDG) wore out quite a lot of vehicles. During their lifetime these vehicles were very carefully looked after and if, due to lack of spares or some other reason, one had to be abandoned temporarily in some remote spot, it was a point of honour always to go back for it with a recovery team if this was at all possible. However vehicles do not last for ever and when, in spite of careful nurturing by the Group's skilled fitters, they succumbed to the prolonged battering they received over all that terrible country, they were returned to Ordnance. Whatever happened to them after that was not recorded and until recently, so far as we of the LRDG Association were aware, no vehicle used by the Group survived the war.

It came as a great surprise, therefore, to learn that a Chevrolet WA 133-inch wheelbase 4×2 30 cwt truck had been found lying in the southern sands of the Egyptian Desert, the precise co-ordinates being 23°45′N, 28°22′E (see map). Vehicles of this sort were the very first ones to be used by the Long Range Patrols at their formation in June 1940 (before they became LRDG in December 1940). It was learnt that this one bore the name *Waikaha*, the designation W8 and the WD number 8302. This was proof enough that it really was an LRDG fighting vehicle as another similar vehicle is known to have borne the WD number 8300. The news was brought to us by Vance Haynes, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Arizona who had visited the truck. Our blood was up. We had to have it back.

In order to explain how a fighting vehicle of the British Army ever reached this remote spot, a little background information is necessary. The war in the desert was fought along a strip of coast some 2,000 miles long but the fighting line was rarely more than 50 miles wide. South of this there stretched an area the size of the sub-continent of India. Early in WWII, before the Italians came into it, one officer saw the possibility of exploiting this huge amount of largely unmapped territory. He was Major (later Brigadier) Ralph Bagnold who, as a regular officer in the nineteen-twenties and early thirties, led a small band of friends on journeys of exploration through country which had never before borne the foot (or wheel) of modern man. These pioneers, at their own expense,

**The Chevrolet à la LRDG. This is vehicle R5 'Rotowaro'. (IWM)**

drove Ford 15 cwt 'pick-ups', first the Model T then the Model A and later the V8s. Their names, such as Kennedy Shaw, Harding Newman, Clayton and Prendergast are revered among the surviving members of the LRDG but are little known elsewhere. This is because they never did anything newsworthy like getting lost. Their journeys were planned with care and thoroughness and their navigation was perfection. A great debt of gratitude is owed to them for passing on their desert knowledge to those of us who came later.

In 1940 Bagnold saw that the Italians, with their established bases in the south of Libya, were in a position to move south to Chad, where they could disrupt important air routes, or east to the Nile Valley and threaten Egypt from the south. No means existed in those days of limited range aircraft to find out what an enemy in such remote places was up to. Bagnold saw that it could be done by a small force trained in the ways of his own desert journeys and equipped with the right vehicles.

During the First World War there had been Light Car Patrols which had guarded the western desert approaches of Egypt from the Senussi. They had used original Model T Fords with oversize tyres. They invented the sun compass and the condenser for the radiator and were great innovators in every way. The unit which Bagnold envisaged would be a band of worthy successors to those men with their Model Ts. He searched for a suitable vehicle and the only viable candidate was the Chevrolet 30-cwt commercial truck which the British Army did not possess. It was known that the Egyptian Army had some and they were talked into handing over 19. Altogether 33 were required to form the nucleus of the new group so the remaining 14 had to be bought from the Chevrolet Company in Alexandria.

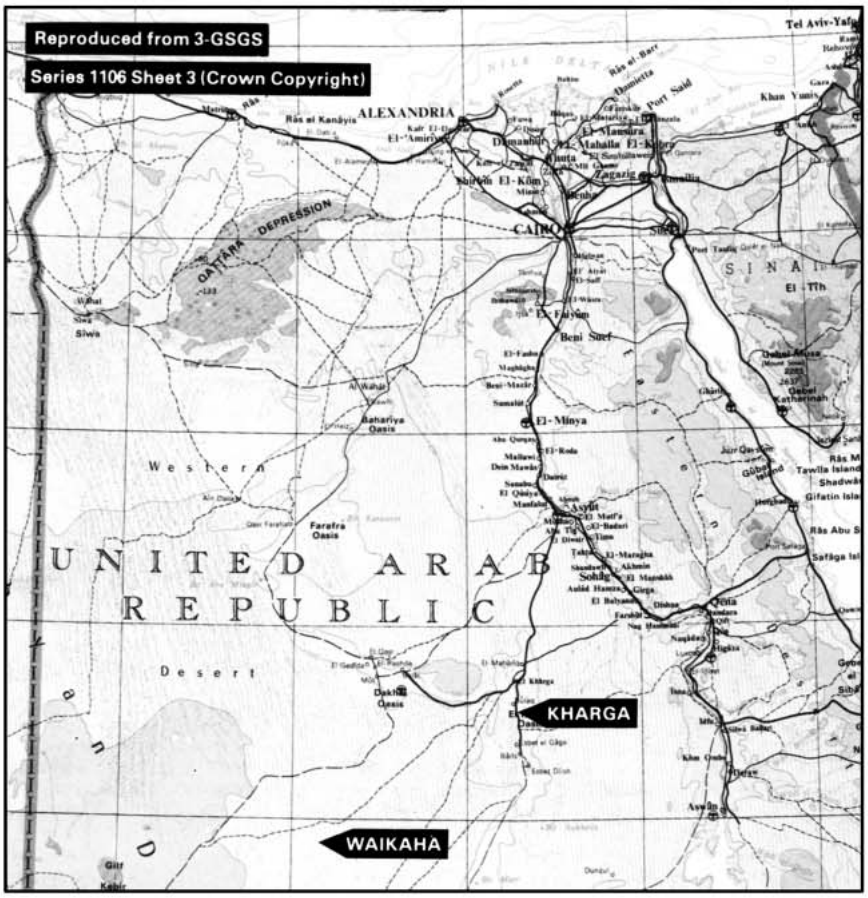
They were stripped of all non-essentials like windscreens, fitted with machine gun mountings and made to carry a total weight of two tons with reinforced springs. Brackets for sand channels and the sun compass, radiator condensers and, for the wireless trucks, provision for the set and the aerial poles, were all essential additions.

For personnel, Bagnold chose New Zealanders. He considered that, man for man, they were more mature, responsible and independent than their Pommie counterparts. (No comments about this, please.) It is a subject which we of the LRDG got fed up with very quickly once mutual respect had grown out of our joint operations. Later recruits for the group were drawn from the Guards Brigade, Rhodesia and the Yeomanry regiments in addition to the Kiwis. Specialists such as signalmen, fitters and medics were usually of British Army origin.

From the very start the Group got on with its job of obtaining information from enemy held territory — with a little piracy thrown in for good measure. The huge expanse of desert was exploited to the full and journeys over country which had hitherto been considered impassable became routine. Careful preparation and following the Bagnold teachings enabled the patrols to travel across the empty spaces, navigating with precision so as to arrive at a spot on the map unseen and unsuspected by the enemy. Information was keyed back to Army HQ by the skill of men of the Royal Corps of Signals using a normal No. 11 set. Navigation was by the sun compass which Bagnold had perfected during his 'trips'.

It was essential to have a reasonably secure base from which to start all these long journeys. One such base was Kufra, down in the south of Libya, some 600 miles south of Tobruk. It was captured from the Italians by the French after they had come north from Chad to join New Zealanders and Guardsmen of the LRDG in an epic raid on Murzuk in the first few days of 1941.

The spot where *Waikaha* was found is something like half-way between the Nile Valley and Kufra. The indentification W8 means that it was Truck No. 8 of W Patrol, one of the original New Zealand patrols, which was later disbanded and its vehicles handed over to the Guardsmen when they were recruited in December 1940. All the vehicles in W Patrol were given names starting with 'Wai' meaning water. Clarkie Waetford, now living in Whangarei, North Island, christened W8 *Waikaha* after the homestead in the Hokianga district where his grandparents had originated. The second part of the name, 'kaha', means strong. It is an extraordinary thing that no record exists of W8 ever having been abandoned and since news of its



**November 1983 — the show gets on the road. The Bedford TK and Lada Niva negotiated the European leg with ease. On reaching Venice the ferry was taken to Alexandria.**

**Once in Egypt the story could have been different. Without passes issued by the secret police entry into the desert would have been impossible.**

finding nobody has owned up to abandoning it. The Kiwis blamed the Guards. Photos taken by Professor Haynes showed a curious little Union Jack painted in a circle on the tailboard. Some say this was a first attempt by the Guards at making an LRDG badge but there is no official confirmation of this.

The driving force behind the recovery expedition was Major-General David Lloyd Owen, Chairman of the Long Range Desert Group Association, ex-Y Patrol Commander, and Commanding Officer of the Group from 1943 to its disbanding in 1945. The members of the recovery team were Tony Pearce, leader; Steve Griffiths, engineer; Piers Lloyd Owen, quartermaster; Gary Owain-Ashbrook, treasurer; and me, navigator and scribe. I was the only ex-member of the LRDG in the team. Tony Pearce is the owner of the Grange Cavern Military Museum which is where the expedition started and finished. Steve Griffiths is a civil engineer, ex-SAS, and owner of a Bedford TK 5½-ton truck with a roll-on, roll-off body (a rather superior container) which he used on the expedition. Piers is the General's son. Gary has been involved in many practical operations with Tony and Steve.

We had to have a second vehicle and with very limited funds at our disposal we had to get one for nothing. Fortunately a company was found which was willing to lend us a Lada Niva provided we gave them a comprehensive report on its performance. In fact it went very well in all conditions from the snow in the Alps to the heat of the desert.

There were several things we had to get done before setting off which were additional to the obvious preparations for such a journey. One was to obtain permission from the Egyptian authorities to go into the desert and pick up the Chevrolet. Another was to obtain a licence to export it from Egypt. Letters to the British Embassy in Cairo set the proper wheels in motion and we found a very good friend in the person of Colonel Robert Osborne, the Defence Attaché.

We obtained much help from Dr Bahay Issawi, Director of the Geological Survey of Egypt and a friend of Professor Haynes. Dr Issawi could not give us much reassurance before we set off as to whether anyone had got to the truck before us but he offered to provide us with a guide to take us to where it lay. Subsequent events indicated that there was more to this offer of a guide than met the eye. We became convinced that without our guide we would not have been allowed into the desert at all.

Having received encouraging letters from Colonel Osborne about the passes, we set off on November 2, 1983. The route we chose was Dover to Ostend, through Belgium, Germany, Austria and the north of Italy to Venice, thence by ferry to Alexandria. There were a few difficulties on the way but we finally got on board the ferry in Venice and sailed away. What we didn't know at that time was that the Bedford had been entered on the ship's manifest as cargo instead of a passenger vehicle. This became painfully obvious as soon as we tried getting through the customs in Alex. It took four days of incomprehensible negotiations with the help of an agent to get the Bedford out of the docks. It also cost £500 in back-handers. This was our introduction to the back garden of Allah.

On arrival in Cairo we found the Embassy staff had done a great job in obtaining a permit from the military for us to move the Chevrolet. Also, Colonel Osborne said that completion of the export licence was a mere formality and it seemed there was now no obstacle in the way. Nevertheless one more nasty shock lay in store.

We paid a courtesy call on Dr Issawi who asked to see our desert permits to make sure they were in order. We showed him our newly acquired military permit and he said he was sorry to have to tell us that it was not enough.

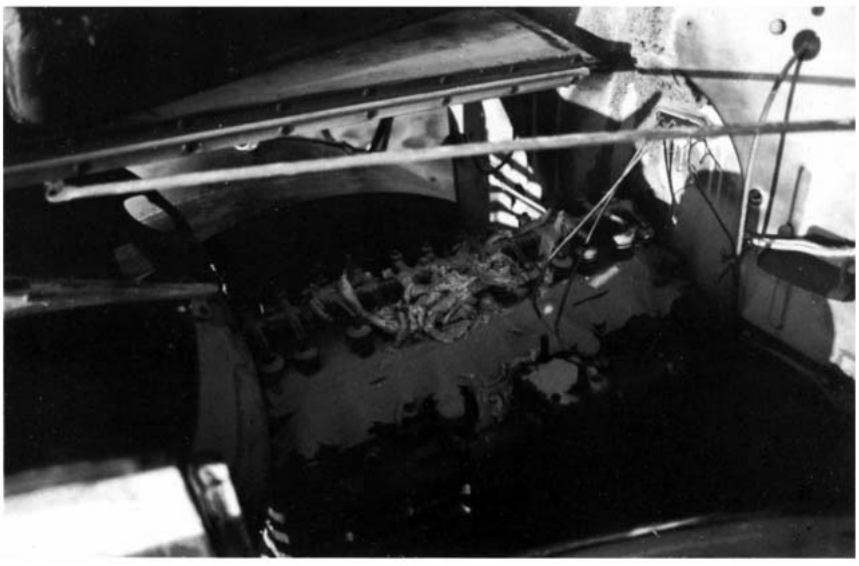
**The shadows were lengthening by the time the party reached Waikaha. Her battles over, here she had rested for forty years. All pictures by Piers Lloyd Owen copyright Long Range Desert Group Association.**

What we required was a personal permit, with photograph, for each one of us issued by the Security Services — meaning the secret police. He said it normally took between five and seven days to get these permits. We hurried back to the Embassy and Colonel Osborne came to our rescue. After a few preliminary remarks like, 'Why the devil couldn't someone have told us?' he mobilised the services of one of the fluent Arabic speaking members of the Embassy staff to go and beard the secret police in their lair and talk them into giving us passes a bit quickly. The efforts of this officer were hampered by the curious working habits of the secret police who did not start work until 9.30 p.m. We concluded they must like working in the dark.

It was now Friday, November 15. Our return ferry from Alex to Venice left on November 29. We simply didn't have the money to stay in Egypt after that date so we made a plan. Piers volunteered to stay in Cairo while the rest of us took the two vehicles to Kharga, an oasis well on the way to our destination (see map) where we were to pick up our guide. There were commercial flights from Cairo to Kharga so it was planned that Piers should pick up the permits as soon as they were issued and join us by air in Kharga. The next flight was on Sunday and Piers planned to be on it whether he had the permits or not. If there were no permits we were going to bash on into the desert and chance our luck.

Fortunately the gods and the British Embassy were on our side. Piers turned up on Sunday morning with the permits and off we went. With our guide, Ali, we sailed through all the check points but it now became very clear that without those permits and without Ali we would not have stood a chance. The entire might of the Egyptian Army would have descended upon us from a great height and our expedition would have fizzled out in some remote guard room.

We were grateful to the military for one thing, namely, the building of roads. Desert travel these days is much simpler because of them than in the days when we had to bump across all those miles of rocks and wadis. We covered the distance from Kharga to the point on the road where we had to turn onto the desert, some 250 miles, by mid-afternoon. From then on it was across the sand in the old-fashioned way. Happily the going was easy and within 45 miles we spotted our quarry



**Snakes and sand — hardly a pleasant combination to have under your bonnet.**

lying quietly on the side of a hill as she had been doing for over forty years.

The time was 4.45 p.m. Shadows were growing long as we arrived. *Waikaha* faced the setting sun as if thinking wistfully of her interrupted journey. She looked, nevertheless, placid and calm and seemed to welcome us. The approaching night was to be her last in the desert — something like her fifteen thousandth lonely night — and I am sure she knew it. Gently we lifted her bonnet and found the valve springs had all been exposed by the loosening of the rocker box. There, a snake had shed many skins but we saw no sign of this creature or what it might have lived on. There was no blade of grass, no insect or beetle, no migrating bird. The woodwork was scoured white. The bodywork was burnished by the blown sand of many a violent storm but in some places the paint remained and, miraculously, the name *Waikaha* and W8 had been preserved and were plainly visible. The radiator grille shone as if newly chromed, all the camouflage paint having been removed by four decades of exposure. The top of the gear box was loose and the gear box full of sand. Tony removed both half-shafts for fear that rolling forward into the container might severely damage the gears. They came away as if brand new. The grille was also taken off to avoid damaging it and to reduce the length a bit. Then we left her to enjoy her last night in the desert silence before the hectic journey which lay before her — not quite so hectic as her action-filled early days but very different from the previous forty years.

Some sand had accumulated on her port side by the action of the wind and this had to be removed before we could roll her into the Bedford's container. Digging away in this sand, Gary found a single round of .303 ammunition dated 1942. Also in the back were the hoops of a canopy designed to go over the cab with some pieces of canvas attached. Such a canopy is a most un-LRDG piece of equipment. How can you use a sun compass if it is shielded from the sun by a canopy? Yet there was the bracket for the sun compass still in position above the dashboard. The debate about the meaning of the round and the canopy is still going on among the ex-members of the LRDG around the world. Therefore I do not propose to speculate here about them beyond saying that all those WA Chevrolets were supposed to have been returned to Ordnance in 1941. So was it some later owner who left *Waikaha* there?

On top of the hill someone had built a cairn of those flimsy four-gallon petrol cans which were such a nuisance in the desert war. The cairn had long since blown down. We built another one of rocks, much more substantial, reinforced with cement and displaying a plaque of Welsh slate telling the world all about our expedition.

Steve then lowered the container on to the sand in front of *Waikaha* and winched her on board. She fitted snugly as if made to measure. Then we were off and away with our prize by 11.30 a.m., Ali breathing down our necks all the time in his anxiety to get us out of the desert — in case we saw any army movements, we thought.

We reached Cairo in double-quick time to find the Embassy staff still trying to persuade the Egyptians to issue an export licence. Finally it was a cliffhanger with the boat due to sail the next day and still no licence. It was only the personal intervention of the Ambassador, Sir Michael Wier, which finally did the trick. He lobbied the Minister of Economics and the Minister of the Interior on our behalf and an export permit was issued and brought to the docks in Alex a couple of hours before the boat sailed.

*Waikaha* is one of the original LRDG vehicles 'borrowed' from the Egyptians in 1940. She may now be seen at the Grange Cavern Military Museum, Holywell, Clwyd. She is unique, as no other genuine LRGD fighting vehicle exists. Inevitably this was a very expensive venture and the costs so far have been met entirely from private funds. There are still many bills to be settled. Any contributions towards the Waikaha Trust will be most gratefully received. (Cheques should be made out to the trust and sent to Barclays Bank, 38 High Street, Mold, Clwyd CH7 1RB.)

**A cairn was erected on the site using rocks, cement and the flimsy four-gallon petrol tins abhorred by those who fought in North Africa.**

**Loading and unloading. Some 2,500 miles separates these two photographs . . . from the blistering heat of the Western Desert to the chilly mountains of North Wales.**

# BATTERIE AUSTRAT

At the end of the Second World War, the German forces in Norway left behind them a large number of intact coastal artillery batteries. Although scattered all along the coastline, the greatest concentrations were to be found at the most important fjord entrances, as for example Vestfjorden near Narvik — the most powerful in northern Europe. The guns for the batteries came from various parts of occupied Europe, and from damaged or captured ships, and were sited in a variety of emplacements, both primitive and modern.

Several of the German batteries still remain and perhaps the most interesting is that at Austråt, on the coast of Troendelag in central Norway. Austråt is one of Norway's old historic towns, and it was here that one of the triple-gun turrets from the *Gneisenau* was emplaced — becoming the more usually-termed Batterie Oerlandet.

The 31,800-ton *Gneisenau* was built by Deutsche Werke at Kiel — the second of a pair of battlecruisers launched in 1936 to a new concept which reduced the amount of armament, as opposed to protection, in favour of providing high-speed capability. Whereas the battleship *Bismarck* mounted eight 15-inch guns as its main armament and had a top speed of 29 knots, the *Gneisenau*, and her sister ship *Scharnhorst*, achieved 32 knots with nine 11-inch guns, mounted in three turrets. It was one of these three-gun turrets

that was removed for the Norwegian battery after the ship was put out of action by RAF bombers at Kiel on July 26, 1942. Prior to that date, the two battlecruisers had seen service in the Atlantic before battling their way to Germany on the 'Channel Dash', the *Scharnhorst* ending her days off North Cape in November 1943 and the *Gneisenau*, stripped of armament, as a blockship at Gdynia, on the Baltic coast near Gdansk, in 1945.

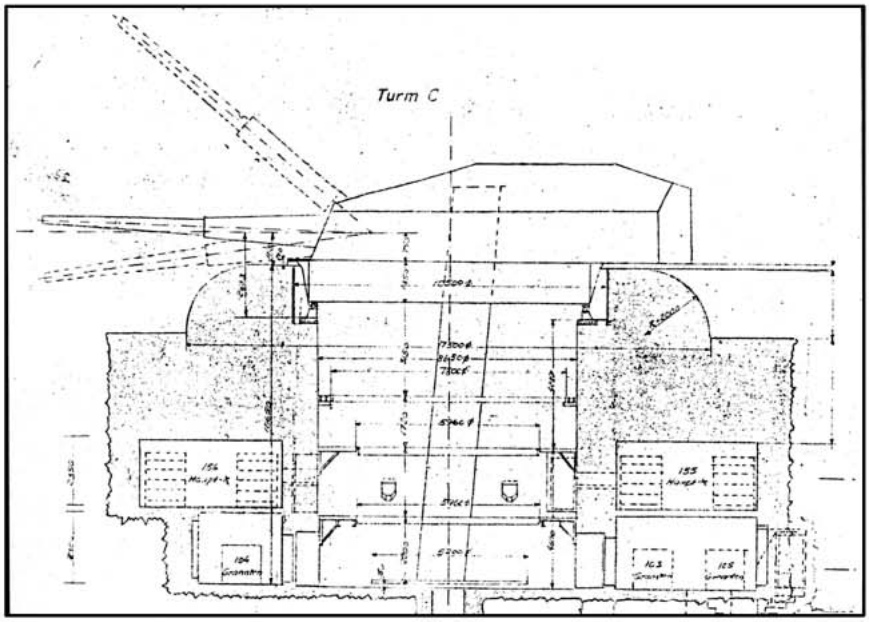
Another of the *Gneisenau* turrets was utilised at Fjeld near Bergen, Norway; and single guns from the third were earmarked for the Hook of Holland outside Rotterdam. The Austråt battery also incorporated three 40mm Bofors and six 20mm anti-aircraft defence, and a 47mm Skoda PaK 36(t) anti-tank gun.

The main turret guns were 280mm SK C/34s with a length of 15.4 metres and weight of 55 tons, each barrel being able to range independently. The cradle alone weighed some 20 tons. The guns could launch armour-piercing shells of 330kg (or high explosive projectiles of 315kg) at 860m/sec out to 48,000 metres, nearly thirty miles, which meant that the city of Trondheim was within range.

The emplacement was blasted to a depth of thirty-feet in the granite and consisted of five levels. The turret could completely traverse 360 degrees in twenty-two seconds with power supplied by DC generators in the ground floor.

The battery became, with a strength of 10 officers and 107 other ranks, part of the 4/507

**Schlachtschiff Gneisenau in March 1941. During the early years of the war the Royal Air Force expended considerable effort to counter the threat of the German capital ships. Many of these operations were to little effect — for example during the first eight weeks that the Gneisenau was bottled up in Brest, with her sister ship the Scharnhorst, Bomber Command carried out 1,161 sorties in repeated assaults. Only four bombs found their mark. During the latter half of 1941 over a thousand sorties were made against the ships in Brest at the Admiralty's behest to little avail. Although she successfully made her bold Channel dash home to Germany in February 1942, a few days later Bomber Command scored two direct hits killing ninety of her crew. She was to have been refitted with 15-inch guns but after more damage in July that year, all repairs were suspended and her existing armament was earmarked for land-based batteries. (Bundesarchiv)**




*Left:* **Captain Jan Steinsvik, now retired, the post-war commander of Battery Austråt (also called Battery Oerlandet), on his old command platform.** *Right:* **In all there are five levels, four of which are below ground.**

Marine Artillerie Abteilung. The command post for Batterie Oerlandet, or Austråt, was located at Loerberen, some three kilometres away in Oerland. Visual observation posts were sited along the coast in front of the battery position having 10.5m stereoscopic binoculars for rangefinding, although in practice the lack of radar would have severely restricted the effective range under Norwegian meteorological conditions.

A special wharf had to be constructed to get the heavy guns and other equipment ashore and the construction work was carried out by 350 Serbian PoWs and Yugoslav workers, sixty-five of whom died at Austråt.

The battery was completed and ready for its first practice firing by 1943 but never saw action as such. On its capture in 1945, demonstration firings were carried out by a combined crew of Germans, Allied personnel, and Norwegians. After five years, the battery was again activated when a 95-man Norwegian crew (with another 23 at Loerberen) began training in 1951 for a full-scale firing trial. Visitors included the King of Norway, on which occasion the firing had to be cancelled because of fog, and Field-Marshal Montgomery. In 1953 the battery was manned once more and, following an intense working up period, a successful firing was carried out at 21,000 metres, hits being scored with the second salvo.

Although the end of the 1953 training period marked the cessation of the active life of the battery, inspection tours by VIPs from both Norway and abroad continued for some time until uncertainty over its future status, lack of trained personnel and economic cutbacks spelled out the official death knell. Recently there has been speculation that a private consortium might take over what is undoubtedly a unique piece of World War II equipment but so far no concrete proposals have emerged. The turret still remains accessible although lack of any maintenance is beginning to have its effect. Its post-war Norwegian commander, Captain Jan Steinsvik, comments that as time passes the situation is becoming worse and the opportunity for a working preservation of the best coastal battery in Norway will be lost.

*An excellent book on the Atlantic Wall from Norway to France has been published in the Netherlands by AMA Uitgeverij, Hoofdstraat 89, 9244 CM Beetsterzwaag. Titled Der Atlantikwall with German text, the book costs 45 Dutch guilders. The author, Rudi Rolf, took the colour shot of the battery reproduced on the back cover.*

**Captain Steinsvik is concerned for the future of what must be a unique piece of Second World War 'architecture'. (Trondelag Pressesenter)**

**Captain Sverre Vilvang, former battery engineer, with the custodian of Austråt Lieutenant Kjell Nilsen.**

# HERMANN GÖRING

## HIS CAPTURE

As one of the founder members of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, Hermann Göring had just celebrated his fortieth birthday when Hitler assumed power in January 1933 and the Third Reich was born. He was one of the 'Alter Kämpfer', the old fighters of the NSDAP movement, and had formed his liaison with Hitler in November 1922; marched with him and was wounded at his side in November 1923; and ascended to become his deputy only to fall from favour and die disgraced in November 1946.

The former commander of the Richthofen Geschwader in the First World War, decorated with the highest German awards — the Pour le Mérite, Iron Cross First Class, the Zähringen Lion with Swords, the Order of Karl-Friedrich, the Höhenzollern Order with Swords — he ended that war a hero with a personal score of twenty-two aircraft destroyed. To Hitler, struggling to establish his new party, Göring's support was an immense asset and he was immediately appointed leader of the Sturmabteilung (SA), the party's shock troops. Once the National Socialists were in office, Göring moved swiftly to reinforce his power base. The Geheime Staatspolizei, better known as the Gestapo, was his creation as were the Konzentrationslager — the word appropriated from the British 'concentration' camps established to gather together civilian sympathisers during the Boer War.

His appointment as Reich Minister for Air followed as did that of Reichsjägermeister — Reich Hunting Master. His official Berlin residence on the Stresemannstrasse resulted in the renaming of the street Hermann-Göringstrasse. He was also Prime Minister of Prussia. To his many titles he soon added that of honorary General of the Reichswehr (his true rank being Hauptmann — a war substantive Leutnant). With the creation of the new Air Ministry, Göring turned his attention to the reconstitution of the German air force and the Air Attachés of Great Britain, France and Italy were informed by him personally that the new Luftwaffe would come into being on April 1, 1935. Its creation added two more titles to Göring's mantle: that of General der Flieger (General of Flying Troops) and Oberbefehlshaber der Luftwaffe — the C-in-C of the air force.

On September 1, 1939, Göring was declared deputy head of state by Hitler, i.e. Deputy Führer, and this was reconfirmed in Hitler's decree of June 29, 1941 which followed the flight of Rudolf Hess to the United Kingdom the previous month. (Although Hess is often described as the Deputy Führer this is not correct as he was the deputy of the Führer, or Stellvertreter, in party matters only.)

Five years later with the defeat of France, Hitler, flushed with success, created twelve new field-marshals. As it was unthinkable that Göring should be equalled in authority, a new rank unique in German history was created — that of Reichsmarschall. Hitler consumated his admiration for Göring on the same day, July 19, with the award of a specially-created decoration: the Grand Cross of the Iron Cross — the only time it was awarded. However, after the Luftwaffe failed to subdue the Royal Air Force in the air attack on England his star began to wane. More and more he withdrew from the decision-making process, spending much of his time at his country estate Karinhall, north of Berlin, his chalet on the Obersalzberg mountain in southern Germany, or the von Eppenstein family castle at Mauterndorf in Austria which he regarded as his personal property.

By 1945, and the imminent collapse of the Third Reich, thoughts of self-preservation became uppermost: not for him the Götterdammerung death in beseiged Berlin, in fact it was his swift departure from the Chancellery bunker after Hitler's birthday celebrations on April 20 that heralded his attempts to save his own skin. Once safely on the Obersalzberg it was the Chief of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe, General Karl Koller, who informed him by telephone from Berlin that Hitler intended to stay in the bunker and commit suicide. The General was instructed to report forthwith to his Commander in Chief and he arrived at Haus Göring on the morning of April 23. General Koller detailed to Göring the events which had taken place in Berlin, explained the military situation, and confirmed Hitler's expressed intention to die in the capital.

The news posed Göring a dilemma for it was far from clear whether Hitler was at that moment alive or dead. If the latter, had Bormann been appointed as Leader or even assumed command of his own accord? As far as Göring was concerned, Hitler's decree of June 1941 had been framed for just such an occasion and he once again consulted its text to refresh his memory, reading out aloud the appropriate passage:

'If I should be restricted in my freedom of action, or if I should be otherwise incapacitated, Reichsmarschall Göring is to be my deputy or successor in all offices of State, Party and Wehrmacht.'

Yet Göring was hesitant to invoke its authority lest his rival and enemy Bormann misinterpret his action to Hitler should he still be alive. Having reassured himself by consulting with Hitler's political affairs chief, Dr Hans Heinrich Lammers, who was also on the Obersalzberg and who had countersigned the document when it was drawn up, that the

decree was still in force and legally binding, Göring finally decided to act and the following telegram was dispatched to Berlin:

'My Führer, since you are determined to remain at your post in Fortress Berlin, do you agree that I, as your deputy in accordance with your decree of 29.6.1941, assume immediately total leadership of the Reich with complete freedom of action at home and abroad? If by 2200 hours no answer is forthcoming, I shall assume that you have been deprived of your freedom of action. I will then consider the terms of your decree to have come into force and act accordingly for the good of the people and the Fatherland. You must realise what I feel for you in these most difficult hours of my life, and I am quite unable to find words to express it. God bless you and grant that you may come here after all as soon as possible. Your most loyal Hermman Göring.'

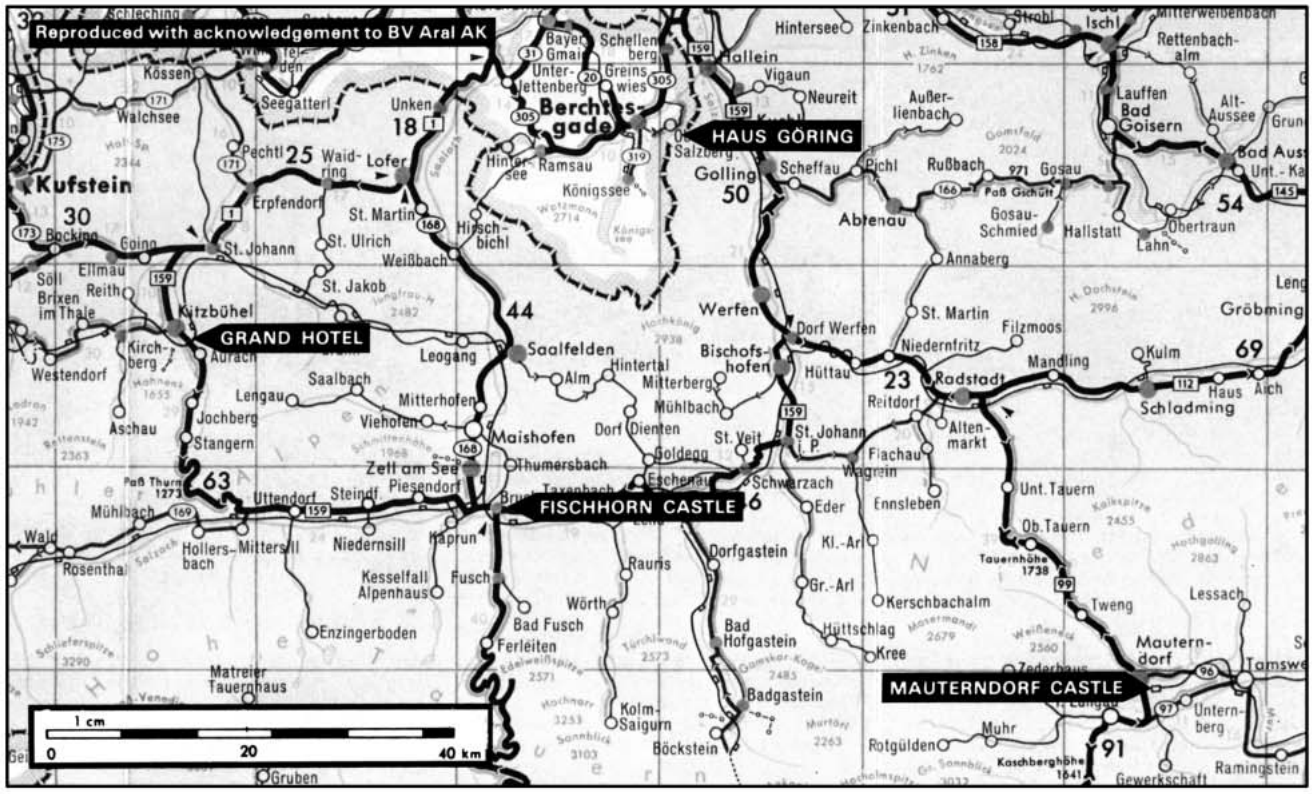
Intercepted by Bormann, as Göring had feared, he lost no time in pointing out to Hitler that the message was tantamount to an ultimatum of a coup d'état by Göring. When a second telegram arrived addressed to the German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, Bormann jumped on it as proof of Göring's treason.

Hitler's predictable reaction was to strip Göring of his right of succession and demand his resignation from all his various offices. In fairness, on receipt of Hitler's reply, Göring immediately sought to rescind the telegrams he had sent out yet it was too late. Overstepping his authority, Bormann himself directly issued orders to the Obersalzberg SS Commander, Obersturmbannführer Hans Frank, to immediately arrest Göring for high treason. SS troops soon surrounded his chalet and placed him and all members of his family under house arrest.

As if that was not bad enough, the next morning, the 25th, the Royal Air Force appeared in force over Berchtesgaden. The attack mounted by No. 617 Squadron, with aircraft carrying 12,000lb Tallboy bombs, had the Obersalzberg as its target and Göring's house was badly damaged as a result (*see After the Battle No. 9*). Although Göring, his family and the SS guards had escaped injury by sheltering in the underground air raid bunker, it was now obvious that even the Obersalzberg redoubt was not safe from attack.

With American ground forces racing across southern Germany it was obvious to Obersturmbannführer Frank that the war was nearing its conclusion and, although Göring was his prisoner, they might well be both caught in the same net. He discussed the situation with Göring and the latter suggested

*Above:* **Scene of the meeting between General Karl Koller, Chief of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe, and his chief on April 23. Two days later Haus Göring on the Obersalzberg was damaged by the RAF; looters did the rest. This picture was taken on July 8, 1946 whilst still part of the Berchtesgaden Recreation Area, open to service personnel only. (US Army)** *Below:* **In 1951, before the area was opened to the general public, the house was razed. Concrete foundations are still visible as well as the partially-sealed entrance to the air raid shelter** *(bottom)* **where the Göring family took refuge during the 617 Squadron raid.**




they should seek refuge further south in Austria in the castle at Mauterndorf. Göring's personality was now making itself felt with his captor and, although Frank sent the former Reichsmarschall's military staff to Salzburg under SS guard, he agreed that Göring's family could accompany him to Mauterndorf.

The move was successfuly accomplished along roads choked with retreating troops. Once at the castle with its familiar surroundings Göring felt even more in charge of the situation. Underground passages led from the castle to the outskirts of the nearby village and Göring's wife's neice, Rosswitha, was smuggled out to get help. Although she made contact with a Luftwaffe Leutnant, he refused to accept that Göring was a prisoner in the castle; not until Emmy (Göring's second wife) came out to see him did he believe the news.

Although the Luftwaffe were now aware of the whereabouts and plight of their ex-Chief, they had no wish to fight the SS guards and end up rescuing a corpse. Also at the beginning of May 1945, in the midst of the wholesale disintegration of a nation, the grounded Luftwaffe were hardly in a position to mount a swift rescue mission. General Koller therefore asked Generalfeldmarschall Kesselring (now C-in-C of all German forces in the West) to provide troops to free Göring. Now that Hitler was dead Kesselring felt obliged to consult the new Führer, Admiral Dönitz. All this took time and no contact was made until May 4, just as American forces were reaching Berchtesgaden, when General der Luftwaffe Wolfgang Pickert (whom Koller had sent south to see Kesselring) was amazed to see Göring standing unguarded at the castle gates.

Göring's orders were specific and to the point: he wanted immediate protection and arrangements should be made for him to meet 'man to man' with General Eisenhower to open armistice negotiations. General Koller must be informed at once! (Rather out of touch with reality, German emissaries were, even then, signing the unconditional surrender terms dictated by Field-Marshal Montgomery in north-west Germany.)

Luftwaffe troops soon arrived at the castle and the SS guards, rather gratefully by now, released their burdensome charge without a fight. Meanwhile General Koller had requisitioned Fischhorn Castle, fifty miles away, ostensibly as a venue for Göring's meeting with the Americans.

Nevertheless Göring was still intent on getting in on the surrender act, which by now was, for all intents and purposes, cut and dried, and on May 6 he despatched a long signal to Dönitz putting himself forward as the best man to negotiate with the Allies. Dönitz did not reply or even bother to acknowledge its receipt. Not receiving an answer, the following day Göring despatched his ADC, Oberst Berndt von Brauchitsch, to the nearest American headquarters with a letter addressed to General Eisenhower. After struggling along the almost impassable roads, von Brauchitsch finally managed to deliver the message to the CP of the US 36th 'Texas' Division, spearheads of which were now approaching Mauterndorf — the division having fought its way across Europe via Salerno, Cassino, southern France and the Vosges.

On the morning of May 8 a detachment of thirty men from the Recon company of the 636th Tank Destroyer Battalion, under the personal command of Brigadier General Robert J. Stack, assistant commander of the

**Burg Mauterndorf. Taken over as a ruin in the 1890s by Dr Hermann von Epenstein, it was restored over the following years, becoming a favoured retreat for Hermann Göring. He arrived here from the Obersalzberg in May 1945. In 1966 the castle was purchased by the Austrian government which has since restored and opened the building as a cultural centre.**

**The road to Radstadt. The precise point on the route between Fischhorn Castle *(right)* and Mautendorf where Göring's entourage was met by General Stack is not stated in the records. Being bypassed by a new tunnel through the rock in the background, this stretch of the original road was worth photographing as it still bears the imprints of tracked vehicles.**

36th Infantry Division, arrived at Fischhorn Castle to take the Reich Marshal into custody. The Americans were furious when they found that Göring had not yet arrived. In fact he had changed his mind about going to Fischhorn, deciding instead to remain at Mauterndorf, but had failed to advise General Koller of his change of plan. When Koller found out that the Americans were waiting impatiently, he, too, was annoyed and he phoned Mauterndorf to request in no uncertain terms that Göring proceed at once to keep the rendezvous.

Göring and his entourage set out for Fischhorn around noon but the roads were clogged and he still had not arrived by 4.00 p.m. Meanwhile, tired of waiting, General Stack had already set out to find Göring. Driving east towards Mauterndorf, it was near Radstadt that First Lieutenant Jerome N. Shapiro first made contact with the Göring bandwagon stuck fast in a traffic jam. General Stack's friendly handshake greeting later earned him a reprimand from the Supreme Commander when he heard of it.

Göring and his party were at once escorted to Fischhorn Castle, both Göring and his wife being still under the illusion that nothing could now stop his meeting with Eisenhower. Emmy later recorded her version of the meeting with the Americans:

'Very fortunately for us General Stack was a man of great tact. He had brought an interpreter with him and although my husband spoke English perfectly he had every word translated, since every detail was so important. I heard everything. Stack had telephoned to General Eisenhower to tell him of Hermann's letter. The American commander-in-chief had said that he was ready to see Hermann and was waiting for him to come next day with General Stack. We were all now under Eisenhower's personal protection and were able to move into the castle of Fischhorn at Bruck, near Zell am See, until we knew whether Burg Veldenstein, Hermann's house, was still standing. We would then go and live in it. Eisenhower had given his word that my husband would be able to see him and leave again in freedom.'

The following day Göring, separated from his family, was driven to the 36th Division HQ located in the Grand Hotel in Kitzbühel on what the Reichsmarschall must have believed was the first leg of his journey to SHAEF HQ. There he met with the 36th Division's commander, Major General John E. Dahlquist and later with General Carl Spaatz, the USAAF chief. Photographers and war correspondents were allowed to attend, using popular jargon 'a photo call', where Göring appeared in his Reich Marshal's uniform. When news of the cordial reception that Göring had received reached the ears of the Supreme Commander at Reims, Eisenhower was furious and ordered that Göring be transferred to the Seventh Army interrogation centre at Augsburg in southern Germany forthwith, and that he was to be treated as an ordinary prisoner of war.

As far as Göring was concerned the VIP treatment that he had been accorded only reinforced his position of importance in Eisenhower's eyes, and when he was driven to the airfield the following day it was in anticipation of a flight to see the Allied commander. Robert Kropp, Göring's lifelong valet who accompanied him, described Göring's first doubts on seeing the five American transport planes lined up on the tarmac: 'There is something wrong', Göring queried, 'no American escort, no officer to accompany me?'

Master and servant were then parted, Kropp being taken separately to Augsburg. When he was reunited with Göring he found him in a state of utter dejection. His medals and decorations had been taken from him as had his ornate Reichsmarschall's baton, and he was now dressed in a plain uniform. The realisation that he was just to be treated as an ordinary PoW must have been a shattering experience.

From then until May 20 he was closely interrogated, the first report stating that: '[Göring] is by no means the comical figure he has been depicted so many times in newspaper reports. He is neither stupid nor a fool in the

**This is the only photograph we could trace of the Reichsmarschall at Fischhorn, taken on May 9 in front of the Texas flag carried by the 36th Infantry Division.**

From Fischhorn the Deputy Führer was taken to the division's headquarters, sixty kilometres to the west in Kitzbühel, where the Texans had taken over the fashionable Grand Hotel, since renamed.

*Above:* There T/4 James Todd photographed Göring and General Stack talking to the division's commanding officer, Major General John E. Dalquist. (Signal Corps) *Right:* We gave our French colleague Jean Paul Pallud the job of visiting Austria and Germany to take the pictures for this feature. One of his onerous duties was to persuade this young thing called Danielle to show him all there was to see.

JP's 'after action' report stated, and I quote: that 'she agreed to show it to me although she was afraid she had no right to do so'. All I can say is she's got a much bigger smile than Göring had on the balcony, Monsieur! Those readers wishing to relive the experience (of sleeping in Göring's bed) at the Park Hotel should book room 128.

Shakespearian sense, but generally cool and calculating. He is able to grasp the fundamental issues under discussion immediately. He is certainly not a man to be underrated'.

On the morning of May 21 Göring was informed to be ready to leave and that his valet would be allowed to accompany him to his next destination. That turned out to be 200-odd miles away to the north-west in Luxembourg where the Palace Hotel at Mondorf had been made ready as a VIP interrogation centre for the Nazi heirarchy dubbed 'ASHCAN'. Its commander was Colonel Burton C. Andrus who was to retain charge of his prisoners when they were later transferred to Nuremberg.

During the next four months Allied interrogators built up their case against the German leadership and prepared the evidence to be presented at their trial as war criminals. Early on it was decided that Kropp should be replaced by a German detainee to break the personal relationship Göring had with his valet, and it was also during this period at Mondorf that Dr Douglas M. Kelley, a US Army psychiatrist, weaned Göring from his drug addiction. His overweight problem — he topped twenty stones on capture — was also tackled and by the time he was transferred to Nuremberg in September he had lost five stone.

The first public session of the International Military Tribunal was held on October 18, 1945 in Berlin. The Russians had wanted the trial to take place in the German capital but no suitable accommodation for the hundreds of legal personnel (each of the four nations had over 500 people on their staff) could be found undamaged. In the end the only choice was the Palace of Justice building in Nuremberg which also had a conveniently sited prison just behind (*see After the Battle No. 2*). Göring was one of 21 defendants to

**With no location given on the photographs other than the 'Augsburg area', JP spent a frustrating two days looking for the location of the Seventh Army interrogation centre, alternatively described in some accounts as a displaced persons camp. It turned out to be a school on Bärenstrasse which is located near Oberhausen in the north-western suburbs. This picture shows the No. 2 man checking in with his ADC, Oberst Berndt von Brauchitsch. (US Army)**

appear before the court. There should have been 24 but Robert Ley committed suicide before the trial started and Gustav Krupp was deemed too old and infirm to attend. Bormann, whose whereabouts were unknown, was tried in absentia although, as it turned out later, posthumously. The charges were narrowed down to four broad indictments:

a) a common plan or conspiracy to seize power and establish a totalitarian regime to prepare and wage a war of aggression

b) to wage a war of aggression

c) violation of the laws of war

d) crimes against humanity, persecution and extermination.

The trial began on November 20, Göring being charged with all four crimes. He pleaded not guilty.

While the defendants were at Nuremberg they were kept in solitary confinement in cells 13 feet by 7 feet containing a bed, flushing toilet, washbasin with running water, a crude

**Although his decorations had been taken from him, Göring was allowed to change out of his ordinary grey uniform (of his own design) into the undress version of his dove-grey Reichsmarschall uniform for the Augsburg press conference on May 11. With him, acting as interpreter, is Major General Paul Kubala. (US Army)**

table and chair. Göring's cell was No. 5. In view of Ley's suicide on October 24, each prisoner was kept under 24-hour surveillance and they had to sleep with their hands outside the bedclothes at all times. If they drew them under the covers they were awakened for them to be placed outside. Each cell was searched once a week.

Göring's cross-examination was completed by March 22, 1946 — one of the major war crimes attributed to him as head of the Luftwaffe had been the execution of escaped prisoners from Stalag Luft III at Sagan — and the trial came to a close on August 31. While the defendants awaited the court's judgement, visits were allowed by the prisoners' wives. Then on October 1 came the verdicts and sentences: Göring had been found guilty on all four counts with the penalty of death by hanging.

The executions were timed for the night of October 15-16 and the prison gymnasium was specially adapted for the occasion. Right from the start Göring told his wife that he would not hang and as we know he managed to cheat the executioner, Master Sergeant John C. Wood, by his eleventh-hour suicide. Pfc. Gordon Bingham of Company C, 26th Infantry, was on duty that evening at the spyhole in the door of Göring's cell, keeping a constant and close vigil. His watch period began at 9.30 p.m. just as Dr Ludwig Pflücker, who was escorted to cell No. 5 by Lieutenant Arthur J. McLinden, saw his patient for the last time. Göring stayed in bed throughout the three-minute check up. Then they left.

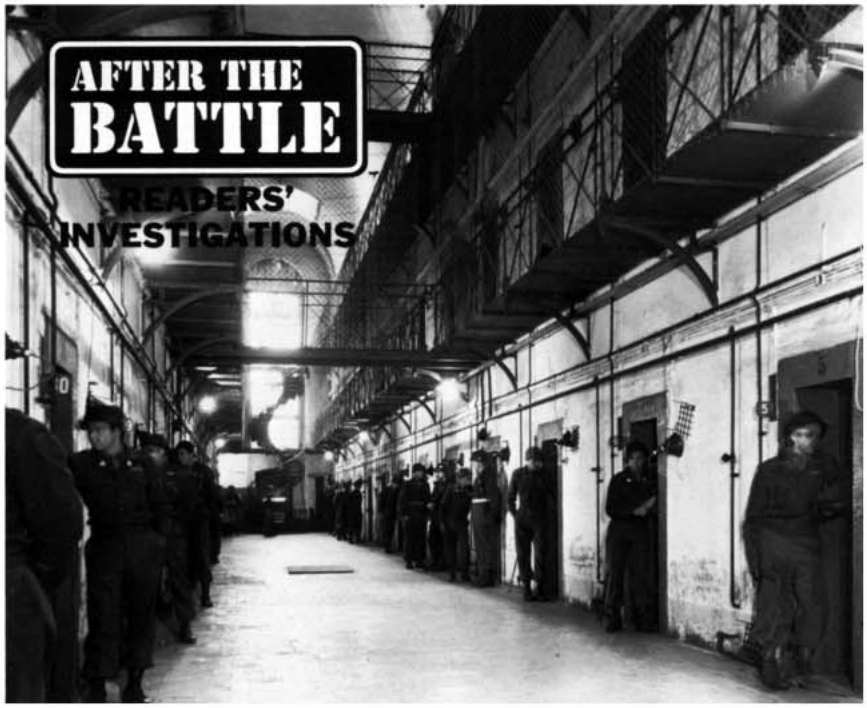
'Then I locked the cell and looked in', Pfc. Bingham reported later, 'and Göring was looking at me with his body close to the port and lifted off the bed a little, and then laid on his back with his arms at his side above the covers. From the time Göring sat up in bed when the doctor came into his cell to the time he laid his hands to his side, I could not see his left hand. He laid like that for about 15 minutes, then folded his hands on his chest, turning his head a little to the left. I then accidentally knocked the light aside and had to readjust it. When I looked in he was looking at me and pointing his fingers at me with his right hand. He then brought his hand down to his side on top of the covers. He then laid in that way for about 15 to 20 minutes, then laced his hands on his chest and kept them there for a few minutes; then, with his hands laced, put them over his eyes. Kept them there for a few minutes, then put them on his chest and then laid there for a short time; unlaced his hands and laid them to his side and brought them up and put his right hand under his armpit close to his eyes; then brought his arms to his sides; then laid there for about 10 minutes; then looked at me and turned away. Then my relief came in and caused a bit of noise. This made Göring look back at me again. Then I moved away as I was relieved.'

His relief was Pfc. Harold F. Johnson:

'I came on duty as a member of the second relief on Göring's cell at 2230. At that time he was lying flat on his back with his hands stretched out along his sides above the blankets. He stayed in that position for about five minutes without so much as moving. Then he lifted his left hand clenched, as if to shield his eyes from the light, then he let it fall back down to his side above the covers. He lay perfectly motionless till about 2240 when he brought his hands across his chest with his fingers laced and turned his head to the wall. He lay that way for about 2 or 3 minutes and then placed his hands back along his sides. That was at 2244 exactly, as I looked at my watch to check the time. About two to three minutes later he seemed to stiffen and made a blowing, choking sound through his lips. I shouted for the duty sergeant who came running down from the cells on the second floor. I told him that there was something wrong with Göring so he took off to the Prison Office on the double. He came back in a few seconds with Lieutenant Cromer, the Prison Officer, and Chaplain Gerecke. Lieutenant Cromer looked in the cell and then I opened the door and Lieutenant Cromer and the Chaplain went in. I followed them in, holding the light. Göring's right hand was hanging down over the side of the bed. Chaplain Gerecke took hold of it and felt for the pulse. "Good Lord," he exclaimed, "this man is dead." '

Ever since then their have been many thousands of words written to explain how Göring had managed the seemingly impossible and retained or obtained a cyanide pill having been in prison for eighteen months during which time had had undergone dozens of searches and had been moved from Austria to Luxembourg to Germany. Naturally there was an official investigation carried out under conditions of secrecy, the full report only recently being made available in the United States under the Freedom of Information Act. Many authors and would-be detectives have speculated on or claimed to explain exactly how Göring achieved his Houdini trick but it has been left to Ben E. Swearingen of Lewisville, Texas, to finally establish the truth. Regular readers will recall that Mr Swearingen purchased the container made from a rifle cartridge which had contained the poison capsule (*see After the Battle No. 31*). We are therefore very privileged to publish his findings which are to be fully detailed in his book *The Plot that Saved Hermann Goering from the Gallows* to be published shortly by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich in the United States.

**ASHCAN today. Professor Préfet P. E. Jacquart took this photograph for us of the old Palace Hotel at Bad Mondorf, eleven miles outside the capital of Luxembourg. (We could trace no photographs taken there showing Göring.) Today no longer a hotel (or even a secret interrogation centre), it is occupied by the local town council.**



**Göring's cell is No. 5 on the extreme right. Such vigilance was continued round the clock, seven days a week, for nearly a year to guard against the risk of suicide. Even so two of the accused managed to cheat the hangman by their own hand. (US Army)**

# HIS SUICIDE

**BY BEN SWEARINGEN**

On the morning of July 7, 1981, I stepped into the tiny cell in which convicted Nazi war criminal Hermann Göring had committed suicide nearly thirty-five years earlier. Less than two hours before he was scheduled to hang, Göring swallowed poison, thus placing US Army authorities in a highly embarrassing situation, and virtually wiping out the hoped-for psychological effect of the Nuremberg trials.

The cell was extremely small, and looked much as it did in 1946. The prison director told me that the only thing actually remaining in the cell from that time was the bunk on which Göring died. The director was wrong in saying that the bunk was the only thing in the cell which was there at the time of Göring's death. In my pocket was the brass capsule which had held the glass vial of poison which Göring used to kill himself. It had been found in Göring's lifeless hand by Army authorities.

The capsule had been made from expended rifle cartridges in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. These self-destruction devices were originally intended for the use of captured German agents, but they were later supplied to senior State and Party officials during the last months of the war. Many of these capsules were ultimately used by the top Nazis, the last of whom was Hermann Göring.

The events immediately preceding Göring's death are well documented. They were reported to Army authorities by the guard who stood outside Göring's cell. At 8.30 p.m. on the night of October 15, 1946, Göring undressed, put on his silk pyjamas, and stretched out on his cell bunk. For a long time, he lay perfectly still, his hands above the covers and down to his sides. His seeming calm amazed those who saw him, as they knew that Göring was under no illusions what the night would bring.

Göring was well aware that the night of October 15 would be his last. He had been secretly informed by the German prison doctor that the executions were scheduled to begin shortly after midnight. The unusual amount of activity in the cell block that night confirmed what the doctor had told him earlier that day.

After remaining perfectly still for more than an hour, Göring began a restless moving of his hands and head. At 10.44 p.m., the cell guard heard a 'blowing and choking' sound escape Göring's lips, and immediately summoned help. But it was too late. Hermann Göring was dead. An envelope was found beneath the covers; it held the brass capsule and three letters which Göring had written.

Göring's last-minute escape from the gallows was a catastrophe for the United States Army officials in the prison. In what had been heralded as a 'suicide-proof' prison, they had allowed Göring to kill himself. It was actually suggested by some in the prison that Göring's corpse be hanged, but this was quickly rejected.

For hours, however, the news of Göring's suicide was withheld from the press, causing some reporters to erroneously report that Göring was the first to hang. When it was finally admitted that Göring had died in his cell, the members of the press were outraged. Relations between the press and the Army had long been strained, and now the reporters turned on the Army with a vengeance.

Göring's suicide became a cause célèbre in the press, far overshadowing the executions

**This plan of the prison is annotated with the names of the occupants of each cell. Göring was flanked by Jodl (No. 6) and Hess (No. 4). Beside the latter's cell was the all-important luggage room. (US Army)**

**Göring's cell measured 13 feet by 7 feet. The toilet is behind the curtain and the crucifix is a post-war addition. (Associated Press)** *Above:* **Relaxing on the bunk which was later to become his death bed. This picture was taken three days after the trial had begun. (US Army)**

themselves. It was charged by the press that the Army had allowed Göring to make a mockery of the whole trial, robbing it of all meaning, and paving the way to a rebirth of German nationalism founded upon a 'Göring legend'. The Russians immediately claimed that there was a 'high-level conspiracy', extending from the White House directly into the prison, which had allowed Göring to cheat the gallows. Only four hours after Göring's death, the Soviets were saying that the Americans had given Göring the poison.

Stung to the quick, the Army decided that an investigation would be held to determine how Göring was able to commit suicide. An anonymous board of three officers was appointed to find out how Göring had got the poison and where he had hidden it. The board worked in total secrecy, and the furore over Göring 's suicide subsided for the time being.

The board completed its investigation on October 23, and held a press conference a few days later to announce its findings. The board concluded that Göring had always been in possession of the poison while in Nuremberg prison. They theorised that he had smuggled it into the prison either by swallowing the capsule or inserting it into his rectum. It was further theorised that Göring had hidden the capsule in his 'flabby navel' and in the overhanging rim of his cell toilet. Most importantly, the board concluded that there had been no complicity or negligence on the part of any member of the Army prison personnel.

One of the letters left behind by Göring supported the board's contention that he had had no assistance in his suicide. While Göring never actually said how he had smuggled the poison into the prison and where he had subsequently hidden it, he devoted much of his letter to absolving Army prison personnel from any responsibility for his death.

The report of the board was accepted as factual, and Göring's suicide was soon forgotten by the media. Not until I began my own investigation into Göring's suicide have the conclusions reached by the Army in 1946 been seriously challenged.

In 1977, I purchased from the son of one of the board members the brass capsule which held Göring's poison. His father had kept it as a souvenir after the investigation. In order to better document the capsule, I ordered from National Archives a copy of *Report of Board of Proceedings in the Case of Hermann Goering (Suicide) October 1946*. It contained a photograph of the brass capsule, as I knew that it would.

I began reading the report just for personal interest. Most of the information was entirely new to me, though I had read all of the Göring biographies. I then saw that the report had been classified as 'Restricted', and had only recently been declassified for inspection. I wondered why the report had been 'under wraps' for so many years.

The first surprise I found was that two members of the board belonged to the 6850th Internal Security Detachment, the very unit assigned to guarding Göring and the others. I had previously assumed that all the board members were disinterested parties to the case. As I read further, something else jarred me.

The report contained the US Army prison doctor's description of Göring's corpse. According to the doctor, Göring's navel measured only '1 cm deep and 0.6 cm in diameter'. Looking at the 4.5 cm-long capsule on my desk, I realised that there was no way that it could ever have been hidden in Göring's navel, as the board had claimed. The doctor's testimony to the board confirmed this; he had told them that this was a physical impossibility.

I learned that the American doctor was still alive, and I telephoned him. At first, he was reluctant to speak with me. He told me that he, and all others questioned by the board, were made to swear an oath that they would never discuss the matter of Göring's suicide. For a long time, the doctor had refused to discuss the matter with anyone, fearing that he could be prosecuted. However, he eventually told me that it was impossible for Göring to have hidden the brass capsule in his navel. He also discounted the rumour of a 'surgically enlarged' navel or a skin-flap hiding place. He ridiculed the idea that Göring could have swallowed the pen-lite battery-size capsule. The doctor could advance no theories of his own as to how Göring procured the poison, but he completely discounted the board's own theories.

After talking to the doctor, I was convinced that something was seriously wrong with the report, and I decided to research all of the board's conclusions.

If Göring could not smuggle the poison into the prison by swallowing the capsule or hiding it in his navel, there was still the possibility that he had inserted it into his rectum. However, the report itself indicated that Göring was given a rectal examination when he was brought into the prison. Not content with this information, I located one of the Army NCOs present when the examination was made. He told me that the examination was 'very thorough', and no poison was found. Upon entry to the prison, Göring had been taken to a small cell, forced to strip, and then a team of doctors examined him. He was then taken, still naked, to another cell, and issued cast-off GI clothing. There was, the NCO told me, 'no way' that Göring could have remained in possession of any poison.

If the board was so off-base in concluding that Göring had hidden the poison in his rectum, his navel, and in his digestive tract, was it any more accurate in concluding that the long-time hiding place for the poison was the cell toilet? The testimony given to the board by one of the prison officers revealed that the toilet was frequently searched. The first and only mention in the report of the toilet being the hiding place for the poison was made by the German prison doctor. It was only a random guess on his part. There was no evidence whatsoever for this assumption. Despite this lack of evidence — and evidence to the contrary — the board concluded otherwise.

In at least one area of questioning, the board was much more thorough. Questions

**The trial had just a month to run when this picture was taken on August 1, 1946. Göring can be seen standing in the dock on the left of the photo reading from notes. (Associated Press)**

asked of the witnesses revealed that the officers showed an inordinate amount of interest in the prison baggage room, the area where Göring's personal possessions were stored under lock and key. The contents of Göring's numerous pieces of luggage had been inventoried, but never properly searched. It was in one of these pieces of luggage that yet another poison capsule was found four days *after* Göring's death.

After hearing the testimony of various prison officials, the board concluded that nothing had been removed from the baggage room without proper authorisation, and that Göring had no access to the great amount of valuables stored in his luggage. Therefore, the board concluded that the possibility of a bribe to one of the Army personnel was out of the question. The baggage room was 'secure'.

I knew for a fact that this was not true. Some years before, I had been contacted by a woman who wished to sell some Göring souvenirs: a wristwatch, a gold pen, and a gold cigarette case. All of these items, she told me, had been given to her first husband, a prison officer, by Göring. I bought all of the souvenirs for my personal collection.

When I checked these items against the inventory made of Göring's valuables, I found that they had all been in his personal luggage in the baggage room. The only way this officer — who had a key to the baggage room — could have removed them was *without* proper authorisation.

Questions formed in my mind. If this officer had removed valuables from the baggage room without authorisation, could someone else not have done the same thing? If there had been *two* poison capsules among the luggage, could someone not have removed one of these just as easily? It was a disturbing thought, as only American Army officers had a key to the baggage room. It seemed unlikely that Göring could have offered anyone a bribe to do so, as anyone with a key to the baggage room could remove whatever he wanted, with or without Göring's knowledge and permission.

Still, I found evidence that *someone* had given Göring the poison. I learned that on October 7, during their last meeting, Göring had told his wife that he had no poison. Nevertheless, he assured her that he would never hang. This assurance would indicate that Göring was sure that he would come into possession of the poison at a later time. It seems that such was the case. Frau Göring later told numerous persons that an American guard had given her husband the poison. Frau von Schirach told me that Emmy Göring maintained this to the day she died.

Once again, I turned to the report, looking for some clue that might point to one of the guards. There was absolutely none. While numerous questions were asked by the board about the loyalty and trustworthiness of the German prison staff, not a *single* question of the same nature was asked of anyone about the American prison personnel. It was as if the board deliberately avoided this area of questioning, fearful of what some might say. It was certainly no secret that Göring was extremely popular with many of the Americans. As one biographer wrote, Göring's guards were 'wax' in his hands.

Then I received a book which two German authors had recently written about Göring's suicide. A quotation attributed to Dr Werner Bross, one of Göring's lawyers, intrigued me. Bross claimed that he met one of the prison officers several years after the trial. The conversation turned to Göring's suicide, and Bross asked the officer how Göring obtained

*Above:* **The guilty man revealed at last. David Hale, our man in Washington, was extremely fortunate to trace this picture showing Lieutenant Jack Wheelis of the 26th Infantry Regiment in Court No. 1. The picture was actually taken at a later trial of twenty-three Nazi doctors held in 1947. (US Army)** *Below:* **The historic courtroom today still in use for civilian cases but simply titled Room 600. (Stadt Nürnberg)**

the poison. The American officer, with a meaningful gesture, pointed to a wristwatch he was wearing, saying, 'A present from Göring, understand?' Bross said that he did, and from that moment on, he knew how Göring had managed to get the poison: Lieutenant Jack G. 'Tex' Wheelis had given it to him.

I wrote to Bross, asking if the quote was accurate. He said that it was, and described the wristwatch to me. It was the same wristwatch that I had purchased from Wheelis's widow some years before!

I decided to contact Wheelis's widow again, to see what she could tell me about the matter. It was too late. She had, her second husband told me, died the year before. However, he promised to have Wheelis's son get in touch with me.

In January of 1980, Judge James Wheelis telephoned me, asking what I was writing about his father. I told him that I suspected his father of giving the poison to Göring. There was a short pause on the line, and then Judge Wheelis said: 'Mr. Swearingen, if you write that, you will have no problem with me. I have always believed that he did it.'

With this information, I began contacting Army personnel who had served at Nuremberg with 'Tex' Wheelis. Wheelis was a flamboyant character, and no one who knew him ever forgot him. Though no one knew for sure, all agreed that Wheelis was the most likely channel for the poison. His friendship for Göring was so notorious at the time of the trial that it was the cause of much speculation after Göring killed himself. All to whom I spoke said that Wheelis *probably* gave Göring the poison, but as yet I had found no one who said that he *had* done it.

One day, I received a tip that I should contact yet another of the Nuremberg officers, one who supposedly had some 'inside information' on Göring's death. I telephoned this officer at his home, telling him that I was working on a book about Göring. He seemed interested, and I then asked him if it would surprise him to learn that an American officer had given the poison to Göring. He immediately responded, 'No, as a matter of fact, he lived right down the street from me'. Thinking that this officer meant his own hometown, I said: 'I think we are talking about two different individuals. The man I am referring to came from Texas.' 'That's right,' he said, 'you mean 'Tex' Wheelis. He lived right down the street from me in Nuremberg.'

Finally, I had the confirmation I had been seeking: Wheelis had given the poison to Göring and this was known to Army officials in 1946.

**This photograph was taken before his body was placed in its coffin — already on hand to be used after his execution.**

I also became convinced that I was correct in suspecting that the poison came from the prison baggage room. When writing his memoirs some years after the trial, the German prison doctor said he was 'convinced' that Göring had removed the poison from his luggage in the baggage room. He further stated that, to his 'certain knowledge', Göring had been escorted to the baggage room by an American officer only shortly before his suicide.

Who was that American officer? A telephone call to a former Nuremberg officer confirmed my suspicion: Lieutenant Jack G. 'Tex' Wheelis was Prison Property Officer at the end of the trial.

I learned that one of the three officers of the board was still alive. I wrote to him, asking the Retired Military Personnel Department to forward the letter to him. In this letter, I detailed what I had found out, asking that he comment on my findings. Some time later, I received an answer from this officer. He absolutely refused to discuss the matter, and told me that he did not wish to hear from me again. To make further correspondence impossible, he deliberately omitted his address from the letter. The tone of his reply convinced me that I had discovered the truth about Göring 's death.

I am convinced that Wheelis gave the poison to Göring — or, more accurately, he allowed Göring to get it for himself from the prison baggage room. I am further convinced that the US Army had reason to know this in 1946, but for reasons that probably had validity at the time, refused to admit this. The real purpose of the board's investigation was not to find out the truth about Göring's suicide, but to absolve the Army of all blame and to blunt the Soviet charge that the Americans had given the poison to Göring. The letter written by Göring to the prison commandant, in which he 'confessed' that he had always had the poison, was nothing but a stratagem to protect Wheelis.

When I entered Göring's cell in 1981, with the brass capsule in my pocket, I appreciated the strange twists of fate which allowed me to know that this was the second time in nearly thirty-five years that a Texan was responsible for the introduction of the capsule into that cell.

**Extract from** *The Plot that Saved Hermann Goering from the Gallows,* by Ben E. Swearingen, published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York.

**Together with the bodies of the ten executed, that same night Göring was taken by army truck south to this crematorium at Munich. To allay the suspicions of the staff they were told to expect the arrival of 'fourteen American servicemen'. (False entries were in fact made in the crematorium records.) Rex Morgan, the US Third Army mortician, masterminded the cremations which continued throughout the next day. He then took the ashes personally and disposed of them at a location he refuses to reveal. Today Morgan is a successful broadcaster on American radio and TV having also appeared in several films.**

# HIS MILITARY MEMORABILIA

BY ANDREW MOLLO

In both primitive and civilised societies the most prized war trophies have always been the personal arms and accoutrements of one's defeated enemy. This ancient custom appears to have been particularly alive in 1945 and no other army seems to have acquired booty with such enthusiasm and discernment and on such a scale as the American.

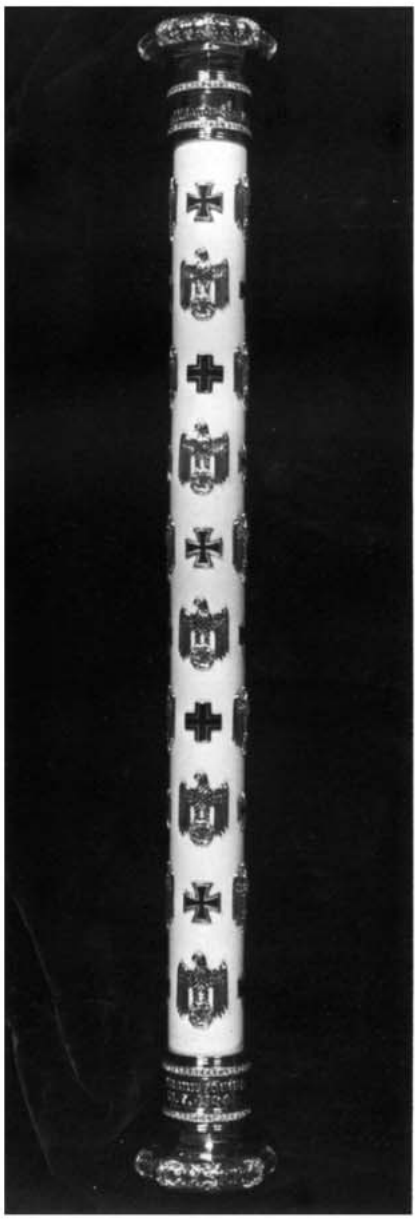
On May 9, 1945, Marshal of the Reich Hermann Göring, C-in-C of the German Air Force and until a few days before the end of the war Deputy Führer, surrendered to the American Army in Austria. On reporting to Colonel Quinn at the US Seventh Army's interrogation centre in Augsburg, Göring, clad in an uncharacteristically plain grey woollen uniform of his own design, apologised for his appearance and explained that his other more formal uniforms had been destroyed when the Air Ministry in Berlin had been bombed out. He was soon to lose even more of his possessions when, as part of the surrender formalities, he was ordered to remove his decorations, which included the Pour le Mérite, Grand Cross of the Iron Cross, 1914 Iron Cross first class with 1939 bar, and pilot's badge in gold, platinum and brilliants. He also handed over his Reich Marshal's baton in its grey leather case which was quickly locked away in Colonel Quinn's safe.

Shortly after, refreshed by a few controversial glasses of champagne, Göring, resplendent in the undress version of his dove-grey Reichsmarschall uniform, held an open air press conference to assembled American war correspondents. It is not known if this uniform survived but the peaked cap worn at this conference came to light a few years ago and was until recently in a private collection in England. Interestingly the gold-embroidered swastika had been removed from the Luftwaffe eagle in accordance with Allied orders forbidding the wearing or display of National Socialist emblems. This cap was valued at £7,000.

While inquisitive officers milled around Quinn's office curious to see Hermann's baton, Quinn suggested to the Seventh Army's Chief-of-Staff, Major General White, that the baton be presented to the army commander, General Patch, at a dinner to be held that night in honour of the visit to the

**This was just the beginning. Having just arrived at the Augsburg Seventh Army interrogation centre in the school in Bärenstrasse, his decorations are taken from him. He is not amused. (US Army)**

**Göring proudly shows off his wedding sword to Charles Lindburgh when the latter visited Karinhall in 1936. Recently the sword changed hands for a six-figure sum.**



**West Point museum display the baton given to General Patch. (US Army)**

headquarters of the Under Secretary for War. The baton was duly presented and accepted by a surprised and bemused Patch. It remained in Patch's possession until after his return to the States in June 1945. Thereafter the baton valued at $35,000 formed part of a travelling display to raise victory loans. After safe keeping by the US Treasury Department, the baton was, in accordance with the late General Patch's wishes, presented to the United States Military Academy museum at West Point and on March 22, 1946 it was placed on permanent display, where it can be seen to this day.

Following a tip-off from Göring himself, the US Army uncovered a veritable Aladdin's Cave at Königssee near Berchtesgaden. In an underground storage bunker Göring concealed his personal possessions and art collection which he had evacuated by train from Karinhall, his sumptuous country residence 50 miles north-east of Berlin. On April 13 the buildings were blown up to prevent them falling intact into Soviet hands. The June 2 and November 24, 1945 issues of the *Illustrated London News* described this vast horde which SHAEF officials had provisionally valued at £375 million. Amongst the old masters, antiques of every description, jewellery and plate were a number of gifts made by students of the Berlin Technical Academy which according to the *Illustrated London News* reflected the 'coarse tastes' of their former owner.

A four-man detachment from the 1269th Engineer Combat Battalion of the US Army took a week to clear the treasure trove and transport it to nearby Berchtesgaden where a small selection of items was put on public display (*see After the Battle No. 9*). As might be expected a number of intended exhibits 'fell off lorries' on the way and ended up in private hands. Items looted by Göring were returned to the original owners if they could be traced, and many years after the war the residue was returned by the Bavarian State to Göring's widow Emmy. From time to time items bearing Göring's crest are sold at auction in Munich where they command considerable sums.

One of the most interesting items to have been 'recovered' from the cave is the so-called 'Wedding Sword' which took the fancy of the man in charge of the engineer detail, Sergeant Bob Thibodaux. Göring's love of edged weapons was well known and so the Luftwaffe

**Surely a huge asset to any display: Göring's underpants! (Lattimer Collection)**

decided to have made a magnificent sword as a wedding present on the occasion of his marriage to the Swedish actress Emmy Sonnemann. One of the best-known firms of Solingen swordsmiths, Karl Eickhorn, was chosen to make the sword. The hilt was solid gold, the grip ivory and the scabbard was covered with blue sharkskin. Göring was delighted with the gift, but its excessive weight (nearly 6 lbs) meant that he usually wore the regulation small sword for Luftwaffe generals. However the magnificent sword held pride of place in Karinhall and Göring took great pleasure in showing it off to visiting dignitaries.

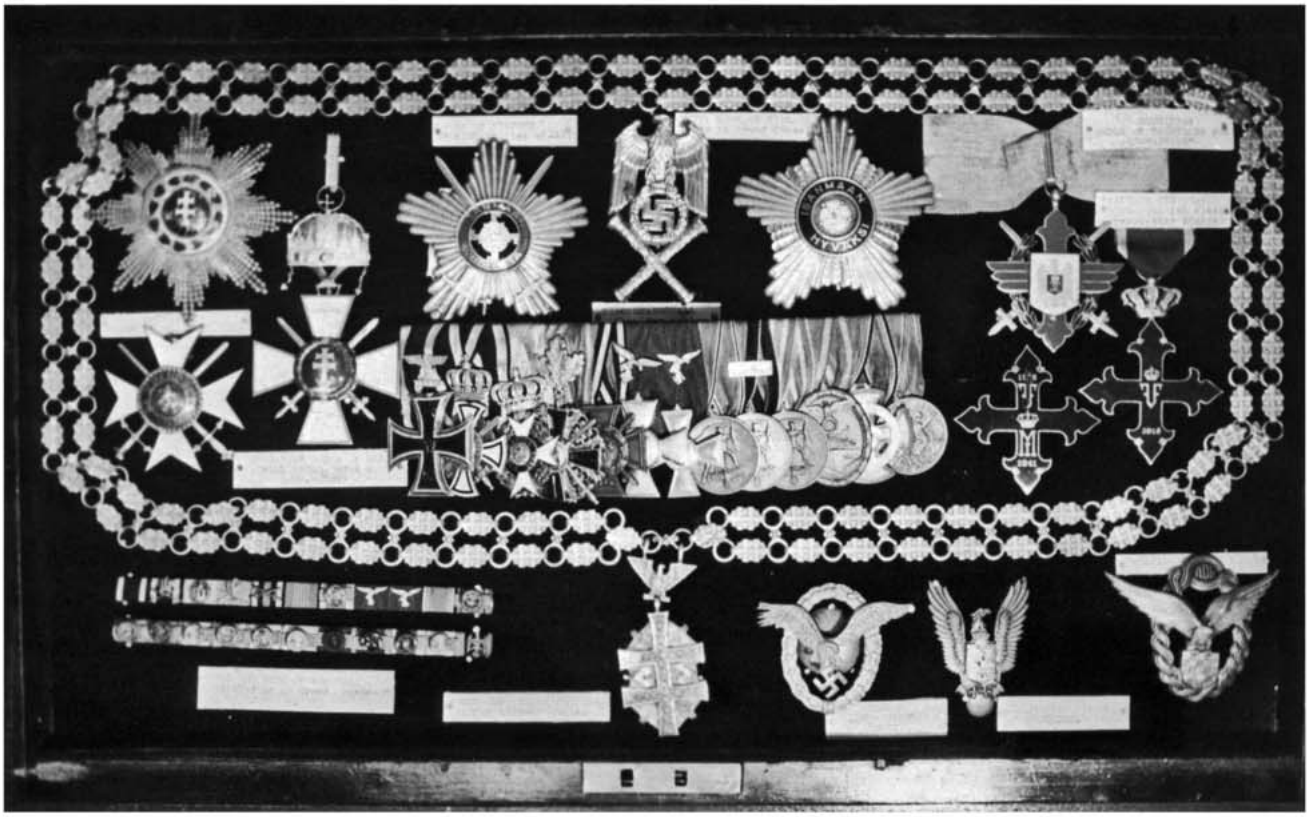
Sergeant Thibodaux simply wrapped the sword up in brown paper and mailed it home. For just over a decade it adorned the wall in his living room until a noted American collector, Lieutenant Colonel James Attwood, tracked it down and persuaded Thibodaux to sell it. The sword has changed hands a number of times until it was recently purchased by a consortium, which included the London dealer Adrian Forman, for £65,000. Since then it has been bought by a collector in Britain for an undisclosed six-figure sum.

Apart from the items in the museum of the Military Academy at West Point, which include both Göring's field marshal's and Reich Marshal's batons, and a very fine hunting dagger given to him by his brother-in-law, Count Rosen, many other items of Göring memorabilia reside in national and private collections.

One man who has made a speciality of Göring items is a distinguished surgeon from Columbia University. Apart from masses of photographs, autographs, china, porcelain and silver, he also owns such exotica as a box of Göring's personal brand of Havana cigars, a felt hat and hunting coat, and the largest pair of Lederhosen that I have ever seen.

A collector in Texas owns one of Göring's unique Reich Marshal's uniforms, and other uniforms and decorations were discovered in Mauterndorf Castle which in happier times Göring had used as a hunting lodge. Apparently both British and American troops were swarming all over the castle when

**Dr John Lattimer has an extensive collection of Göring memorabilia: from his lederhosen to his unsmoked cigars.**



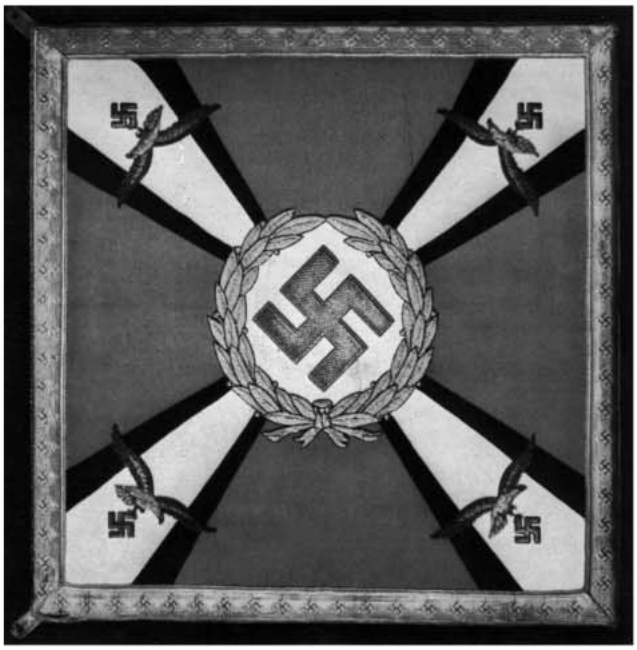
**Possibly 'liberated' from Mautendorf Castle, now in a private British collection.**

American military police took over, but then some British officers came to an arrangement with the MPs and during the night a number of valuable items were removed from Göring's bedroom.

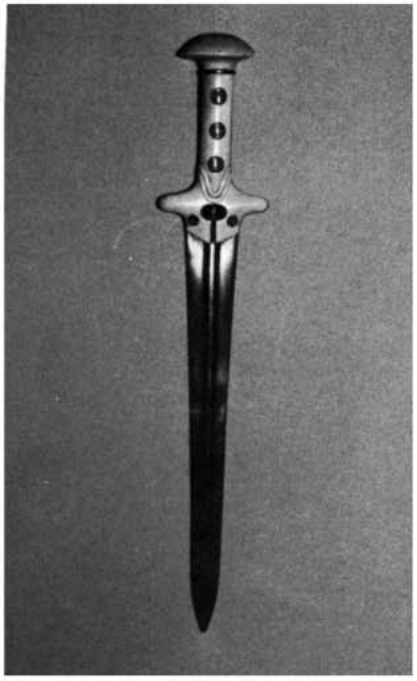
Since the 1950's, a fine collection of Göring's medals and decorations, which may have come from Mauterndorf, has been in the possession of an English collector. It comprises a number of foreign awards given to Göring by the heads of states allied with Germany such as Italy, Solvakia, Romania and Croatia. There is also a gilt metal shoulder strap emblem, but by far the most interesting item is one of Göring's medal bars bearing thirteen medals which he wore on his full-dress uniforms before the war.

In November 1976 a collector, Barry Brown, attended an auction at the well-known firm of Wallis & Wallis in Lewes, Sussex, and for £31.50 bought what was described in the catalogue as a 'well-made copy of an ancient dagger'. It turned out to be a replica of an ancient short sword which had also belonged to Göring, which only goes to show that collectors with a keen eye and a little luck can still acquire things of great rarity and interest for a modest outlay.

The Marquis of Bath is also a keen collector of Third Reich items and one can imagine his amazement when somebody walked into a Sotheby's advice session being held at Longleat with what he claimed were three of Göring's personal diaries. He had apparently found them at the end of the war in a train while he was serving with the Free French Forces in southern Germany. Satisfied that they were genuine, Sotheby's intended to



**Unique. The Star of the Grand Cross of the Iron Cross was specially created to present to Göring after a successful conclusion to the Battle of Britain in 1940. As the Luftwaffe failed in their mastery of the air, the decoration was never awarded. It is believed to have been taken from the Zeughaus in Berlin in 1945 and turned over to the United States Office of Military History and ultimately to West Point Museum where it is today.** *Right:* **Rare items are not solely to be found in museums. This Luftwaffe C-in-C car pennant belongs to an English collector.**



**The discerning collector need not even pay a fortune: Barry Brown obtained this replica antique dagger from Göring's own collection for £31.50!**

**However buyer beware. This cap is purported to have belonged to the Reichsmarschall but did it? All Göring's clothing was finely made and of the highest quality. Compare the crude addition of the felt-backed insignia on this item with the authentic article on page 45.**

auction them but the Bavarian government stepped in and issued a writ against the auctioneers claiming that they were the property of the State of Bavaria.

Göring's train is quoted as the provenance of another item which is on loan to the Imperial War Museum in London. It is a white linen undress jacket or Litewka with concealed buttons down the front and beautifully embroidered collar patches bearing the crossed Generalfeldmarschall batons. The shoulder straps bear the gilt metal Reichsmarschall emblem.

Other Göring items which have appeared on the market since the war are one of his personal standards in Paris and a car pennant in England. The London dealer Adrian Forman acquired from a former British intelligence officer one of Göring's Grand Cross of the Knight's Cross in its original box. The officer said that he had found it in Göring's hunting lodge (Mauterndorf?). This, the highest class of the Iron Cross, was only awarded to Göring and quickly went to a German collector for £10,000. Adrian Forman also offered one of Göring's famous shoulder straps for £1,250.

It is not surprising that items which command such prices should be copied and faked, and if distinguished historians can be taken in by forged diaries, the medal and uniform collector is just as vulnerable. The subject of the Hitler diaries brings one to what must surely be the largest piece of Göring memorabilia to have survived — his yacht. In 1935 the German automobile industry presented to Hermann Göring, as Head of the Five Year Plan, a 16-metre-long motor yacht named after his first wife Karin. In the balmy pre-war days, Göring spent much time cruising the North Sea and Baltic as well as Germany's many rivers and canals. He entertained many prominent guests on board. During the war the yacht remained in a boat yard in Berlin Gatow, but shortly before the surrender it was evacuated to Kiel where it fell into British hands.

A use was soon found for it by its new masters and in it Field-Marshal Montgomery was taken on a tour of Hamburg's devastated harbour. In 1950 the boat was moved to the Rhine and, as the *Prince Charles*, became the flagship of the British Rhine Flotilla and the Royal Family used it on a number of occasions. Towards the end of the 1950s, Emmy Göring began to seek restitution of the yacht on the grounds that it had never been used for training or by the armed forces and was private property, and in 1960 the Queen returned the yacht to Frau Göring. It changed hands a number of times until in 1972 it came into the possession of the *Der Stern* reporter with a penchant for 'Nazi' relics, Gerd Heidemann. Heidemann restored the yacht and filled it with Göring momentoes such as a cupboard full of uniforms from a well-known firm of Munich theatrical costumiers. He then invited former prominent Nazis for drinks on board the yacht and photographed them sipping Seckt. It was during these carefully stage-managed publicity stunts that Heidemann claimed he had first heard about the existence of the Hitler diaries. One wonders if he ever got the million Marks he was asking for the yacht and its 'original' contents!

So what did happen to those decorations which Göring was ordered to remove shortly after his surrender? They eventually came to rest in the property store in the Nuremberg jail where they remained until after his death. Before he relinquished command and returned to the States one last task remained for the American commandant, Burton C. Andrus. 'I wanted to make absolutely sure that none of Göring's huge collection of jewelled insignia would remain to be glorified by an imitator', wrote Andrus later. 'I had every piece of jewel-encrusted decoration torn apart. The precious metals were melted and the stones put together. They were handed over, unrecognisable as far as origin was concerned, to the new German economy.'

**Yacht with a colourful past. Karin II — built for Göring and used by the Third Reich hierarchy, Montgomery, the Royal Family and latterly owned by the 'Hitler' Diaries man, Gerd Heidemann. (Associated Press)**